

# LONDON READER

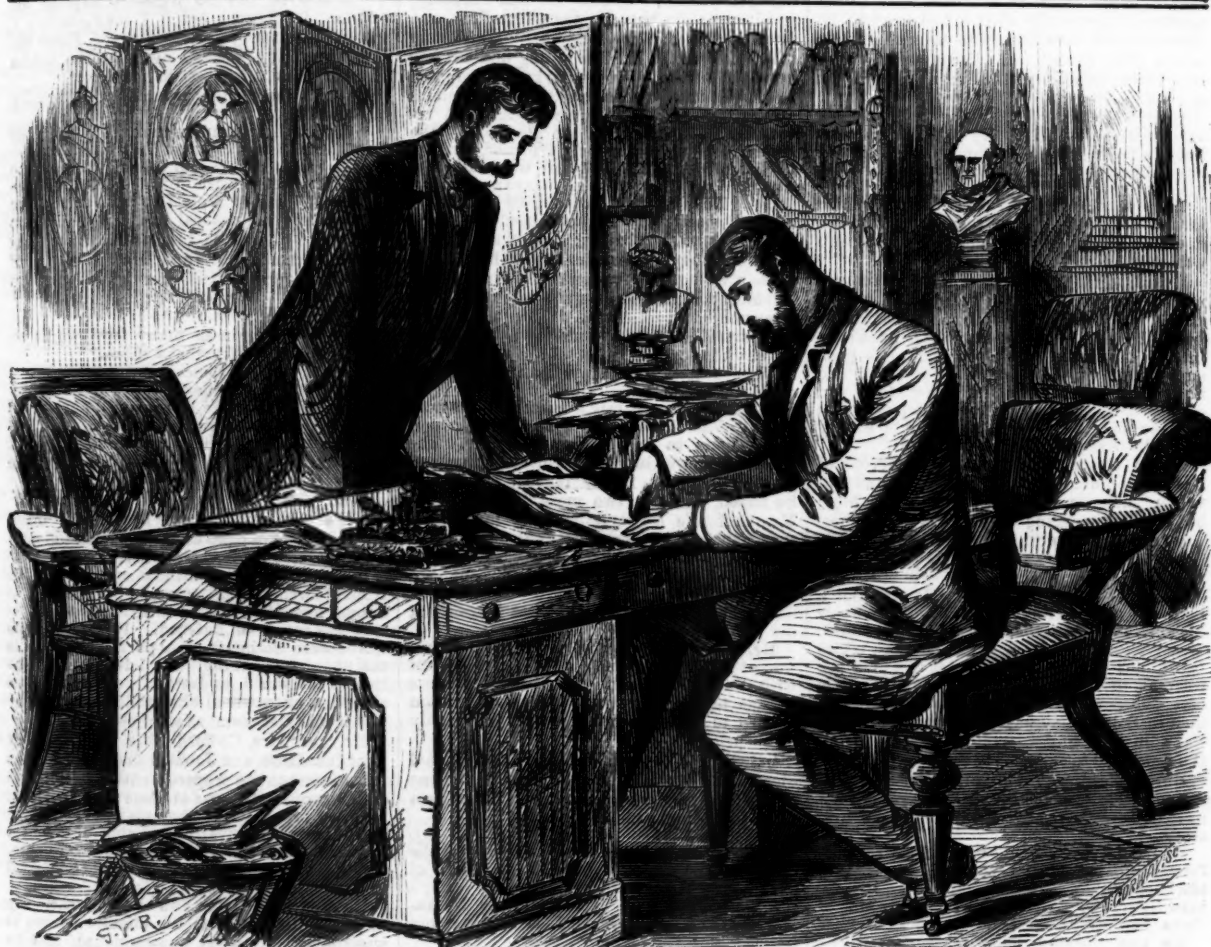
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[DAVID DEVENISH SEALED THE WILL WITH HIS OWN RING.]

## THE CURSE OF THE LESTERS.

### CHAPTER IX.

DAVID DEVENISH went back to Yorkshire full of a deep content. He knew that Vana did not love him; but he had every hope his affection would win her heart in time.

He was a man to give his trust entirely when he gave it at all, and he felt that his darling would never have consented to be his wife had she not been sure of her power to conquer the old attachment and banish her first lover from her mind.

True, a very precise person might have argued that Vana had not as yet formally consented, but David judged her too generous to have raised false hopes in his heart and have left him for six weeks in a fool's paradise if she meant after all to send him away.

So he went home with a new joy written on his face, a great happiness shining in his dark eyes, and in those days there was a pleas-

ant stir of preparation at the White House, as David's place was called.

The home where generations of Devenishes had lived and died was thought by its master to need many repairs and alterations before it was worthy of his penniless bride.

How he loved her!

Mrs. Clifford, coming over at his request to give her opinion respecting the refurnishing of the drawing-room, was astonished at the patient care bestowed on every detail.

He seemed to think no trouble too great, no exertion too wearisome if either was for Vana's future pleasure.

"I never was so glad of anything," said kind, motherly Mrs. Clifford, when he told her of the result of his visit to Vale Lester, "that child was too frail and delicate for sorrow. My cousin Hepzibah's a good woman, but I doubt if she understood what a tender creature she had to deal with. The first time I ever saw Vana I thought she needed some one to love her, and I've never changed my mind."

Mr. Devenish sent many letters to the

Vicarage, and now and then he was answered in a clear, round, girlish hand.

Vana had not much to tell her lover. Her letters were for the most part simple replies to his, but such as they were, the little notes were very precious to David Devenish. It was a very happy time to him, those autumn weeks of preparation and looking forward.

He had no near relations, he told Vana's uncle, adding that there was no one with a right to criticise his wife.

Perhaps, literally speaking, he was correct, but there was a certain house in the village where two ladies lived, both of whom considered themselves very nearly connected with Mr. Devenish; these were Mrs. Morton and her mother, Mrs. John Devenish.

Both were widows, and both were terribly poor. The elder had married David's uncle, and the younger was his own first cousin.

They had never lived in Yorkshire until the last two years, when a very gracefully worded letter to David, hinting delicately at their extreme poverty, had drawn forth the offer of a very pretty house belonging to himself, rent free for his aunt's life.

That these two ladies had at first any ulterior motive in attracting the attention of their wealthy kinsman we will not positively say, but from the moment Julia set eyes on the White House she decided she was fitted in every way to become its mistress, and her mother, a woman of large body and somewhat limited brains, was not too obtuse to perceive the benefit that might come to her from such a son-in-law as David Devenish.

They were very wary, these two. They didn't harass David by a multiplicity of attentions, they rarely obtruded themselves on his notice, but they had quite made up their minds that though the Ferns was a very cosy little abode they would soon desert it for the White House.

Every one at Sandstone knew their designs except Mr. Devenish. He did not particularly admire his kinswomen on a nearer acquaintance, but he could hardly go back from his offer.

They were desperately poor, Mrs. Devenish having only a very small annuity, and her daughter the scanty pension of a captain's widow.

David would rather have allowed them a moderate income (after he grew intimate with them), and been free of their close neighbourhood; but to their poverty they joined an intense amount of pride—his house, a good supply of fruit, vegetables, poultry, and flowers—a liberal use of his servants and carriages, all these good things the ladies took as their simple due; but the offer of money would have seemed to them an insult.

David Devenish, the most unaffected of men, never dreamed that his cousin was, in vulgar parlance, "sitting her cap" at him; but keenly discerning where Vana was in question, he saw almost from the hour of their introduction to Mrs. Clifford's young guest that they disliked her.

It troubled him very little. He was not a man to go out to meet difficulties. He knew his aunt to be a thorough woman of the world. When there was a mistress at the White House she would, doubtless, see it was to her interests to be polite to her; if not, if either Mrs. John—who was never called Mrs. Devenish in Sandstone—or her daughter annoyed Vana in any way, his mind was made up, the remedy was easy—they could go.

But the feeling they did dislike her, though not sufficient to make him uneasy, was enough to close David's lips to them about his love story.

He fell back on kind, motherly Mrs. Clifford for sympathy, and never in his visit to the Ferns—they grew very rare after his return from Vale Lester—suffered the name of Vana Tempest to escape him.

He was walking home from church one Sunday morning with Mrs. Clifford, and she gave him the full history of Sir George Lester's death, and the strange mystery in which it was involved.

Mr. Devenish, who had read the newspaper reports, was much interested, but when his friend told him of Simon Lester's will he declared it was an injustice, and ought to have been set aside.

"That was impossible," said Mr. Clifford, striking into the conversation. "I grant you the will was unwise, still it was infinitely better than making none at all."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Clifford. "Why they would all have shared equally then."

She and her husband were fondly attached, and the smile with which she spoke took all the sting out of her contradicting them; but to David's surprise Mr. Clifford held his ground.

"I think a man falls in his first duty to his fellow-creatures if he neglects to make a will."

"He has a right to do what he likes with his own," objected David, slowly.

"Precisely. Let him leave his property to a stranger if he pleases, but he ought to make a will."

"Why?"

"Because, otherwise, he leaves a great burden of uncertainty to his relations. Of course, when a man has children it is different; otherwise, the heir at law takes possession, and does not feel certain for a few years, perhaps for many, whether a will may not be found which will turn him out."

"There is something in that."

"I can tell you a crueler instance," said Mr. Clifford, thoughtfully. "A man in my employ had saved a good bit of money, five hundred pounds, I think. He died suddenly, and it came out that he was a foundling, and consequently had no relations. He left no will. His wife, a delicate, ailing woman, was quite unfit to cope with poverty. Would you believe it, that by law she could only claim one-half of his little property—the rest reverted to the Crown! I am glad to say the Queen graciously restored it to her, but she had to take as a charity what was really her own, and there were endless delays and annoyances. That comes of not making a will."

"Still, we are not all foundlings," suggested Mrs. Devenish. "Do you know I am one of the great body you condemn? I have never made a will. I never even thought of it."

"More shame for you!" said the hot-tempered old gentleman. "If you take my advice you'll make it to-morrow. You won't die any the sooner."

The conversation dropped, but Mr. Devenish could not forget it.

It wanted now barely a month to his next visit to Vale Lester, when he hoped to persuade Vana to fix their wedding-day. The moment she was his wife he meant, of course, to make his will in her favour. It would, he hoped, be only two months' delay; but Mr. Clifford's conversation had made him thoroughly uncomfortable, and chancing to have business in Whitley the next day, he called at his lawyer's office and propounded the following question:

"If I die without a will, what becomes of my property?"

Mr. Graham, the junior partner (his father was at home with gout), had been at school with David Devenish. The two were close friends and firm allies, but this question seemed to take the young lawyer thoroughly by surprise.

"Bless me!" he said, losing all professional dignity and speaking as he might have done in the privacy of his own home. "You don't mean to say you haven't made one?"

"Just so."

"My father ought to have insisted on it the day after you came of age. I never heard of such a fearful piece of forgetfulness."

"Never mind that, Jack," said Mr. Devenish, a little gravely. "Just answer my question."

"You have no nearer relation than Mrs. Morton, I think?"

"Only her mother."

"Her mother is not your relation at all, only your uncle's widow. Well, Mrs. Morton would take everything—every penny piece."

David drew a long breath.

"Can you spare me ten minutes, Jack?"

"Twenty if you like. I've got to go out at twelve, but I could put it off."

"The ten will suffice. I want you to take pen and paper and make my will."

"What, now?" exclaimed the other, fairly horrified at the irregularity of the proposal.

"Now, this minute. Write it down yourself, Jack, there's a good fellow. I don't want your clerks to know the contents."

One of the clerks was the Vicar's only son, a young gentleman who worshipped (vainly) at the shrine of Julia Morton. Had her cousin this fact in his mind when he made his peculiar speech?

"All right," Mr. Graham took up a pen in a very business-like manner. "It's most unusual; and having waited all these years, you might as well wait a few weeks longer, it seems to me, and have the thing done properly."

"I don't suppose you'll do it improperly,"

Jack. The fact is, I hope to be married in two months' time, but I don't like to leave things unsettled after what you have told me about my cousin."

"But it'll be all the same, I suppose?" observed Mr. Graham, slowly. "If you marry her it'll come to her as your widow."

"But I don't happen to be going to marry my cousin."

"Oh!"

"Now, what does that mean?"

"A lawyer has no right to express an opinion, I suppose; but if I may venture I would suggest to you to empty the Ferns before you bring a bride home to the White House. Now, let us get to business."

Even he was hardly prepared for the brevity of the will.

"Word it how you like to make it legal, but here's what I want to say. I give all I have—land, houses, money—all I ever possessed, to Vana Tempest, niece of the Rev. James Tempest, Vicar of Vale Lester, Norfolk, for the whole of her natural life, and to leave to whom she pleases at her death. And I beg my old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Clifford, of Sandstone, to act as her guardians and protectors."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, it's up in as many legal words as you like, but that is what I mean."

"You'll want a trustee for the property. I suppose you mean the Clifford's more as personal guardians. We may as well have it all correct, though it'll never be acted on. You look the picture of health, Devenish, and I shall hope soon to draw your marriage settlements."

David smiled.

"It's only a form; but I want her made quite safe. It is up so that she can't give it away or have it taken from her."

"I understand," and the lawyer decided his friend feared the *fancie* might be induced to despoil herself in favour of Mrs. Morton.

It was very soon finished. David's simple words were clothed in legal phraseology, but it meant the same thing. He left Vana all he had in the world, to descend to her children after her, or to whom she might appoint by will if she died unmarried or childless.

Mr. and Mrs. Clifford were to act as her joint guardians, and John Graham himself was to be trustee to the property, with a very liberal emolument for the loss of time thus involved.

It was probably the shortest will the lawyer had ever drawn, covering one side of a sheet of letter paper, but it was perfectly in rule, and as Mr. Graham observed, would hold good in any court of law.

He rang the bell for two of his clerks. By some intuitive guess at his client's wishes it was the two youngest he summoned, and he gave them a parting caution.

"Remember, not a hint of this in the office. Discretion is the first step to success in our profession."

The ladies were little more, understood. They watched David Devenish sign his name, and wrote their own afterwards.

Then they went back to the clerk's office, thinking they would gladly witness a will every day, it doing so brought such a crisp bank note as Mr. Devenish had slipped into their hands when he thanked them.

"You are quite sure it is all right?" asked Vana's lover, anxiously, when they had withdrawn.

"Positive—but I cannot understand your uneasiness. You are in perfect health, and after neglecting the precaution for fourteen years I can't make out your hurry."

"You see, I never had anyone to be anxious about until lately," confessed Mr. Devenish, "and my little girl is almost alone in the world. I couldn't bear the thought of dying and leaving her unprotected for."

He sealed the will with his own ring, and John Graham locked it up in an iron safe; then David Devenish went out again into the winter sunshine, feeling whatever happened to himself his darling's future was secured.



## CHAPTER X.

VANA TEMPEST fled from Basil's presence, hardly knowing where she went. She felt she should break down utterly if she stayed there another moment. His repulse had wounded her to the very heart.

She felt like some poor stricken deer. She had known her hero false, but she had never before thought him cruel.

Vana had looked on Basil's perfidy more as weakness than positive heartlessness; until that moment it had seemed to her Fenella Devour's fortune tempted him, that he forsook her (Vana), because he had not courage to face poverty for her sake.

Alas! never again could she think even thus mercifully of him.

She was going towards her own room when she met a gentleman, whom the servant was evidently taking to her uncle. Vana had never seen him before, but the albums at the Court held several photographs of him, and from these she knew that it was Percy Lester.

He started on seeing her. Then the small untrained servant, evidently thinking Miss Tempest could finish her duty, retreated to the kitchen, and Vana and the stranger were alone in the narrow passage.

The Vicarage was a modern house, built by Mr. Tempest's predecessor, a bachelor of good private means. This gentleman had spent many years in Africa, and from pleasant memories of those years had constructed his English home on the model of one he had inhabited in the sunny colony.

The Vicarage was entirely on one floor, and so arranged that every room opened on to a verandah which ran all round the house.

Mrs. Tempest condemned this plan of architecture much, but it had one great advantage, all the sleeping rooms being in the middle, with the nursery, kitchen, and dining-room at one end, the study and drawing-room at the other, it came about that the noise of the children, the smell of cooking, and the clatter of servants' work could not invade the study or drawing-room, and any conversation held in these rooms was by the same means quite secured from any ears at the other end of the house.

Vana, left alone with the stranger, had turned towards the drawing-room door, where the sound of voices told that the vicar had joined his guest, but Percy Lester seemed not to see her movement, and walked into the study, whence a soft light shone from the vicar's reading lamp.

"I beg your pardon," he said, gravely, as Vana followed him with a surprised look on her face, "I came to join my nephew who is calling on Mr. Tempest, but seeing you made me want to ask you a few questions. I think you know my wife."

Very much bewildered by this conversation, Vana admitted that she had met Mrs. Lester, who had—she said simply—been very kind to her.

This said, she made another move towards the door, but Mr. Lester stopped her.

"I will not detain you long; but I—I knew your mother, and—"

A glad cry of surprise from Vana interrupted him.

The girl was looking at him with eager eyes.

"Oh, sir," she said, simply, "did you really know her, my beautiful, dead mother? You will tell me she was good and true, won't you? She was the best and dearest mother girl ever had, but no one loves her here! When I came first, a year ago, Aunt Hephzibah made me promise never to speak of my mother to her children; and even my uncle, who is very kind, won't talk of her."

"You see," went on Vana, naively, "we lost my father so very soon after I was born; and then my mother took me abroad, and I never even knew about Uncle James till she was dying. Perhaps she was married such a little while before my father died that his

relations didn't feel quite as if they knew her."

Percy Lester knew quite well that Vana's mother had never even met a single member of her husband's family, but he was not going to say so.

The poor girl's speech had told him two things—that she had no idea of any secret in her mother's past, and that Mr. and Mrs. Tempest must be good and true at heart, or they would never have kept it from her.

"I knew your mother," he resumed, his eyes fixed on the ground although they could not meet Vana's. "It must be twenty years nearly since I saw her, but I have never forgotten her, and I should have known you anywhere from your likeness to her. She was younger than you when we first met; pretty, bright-haired Dorothy Tempest, the loveliest face and the truest heart that Heaven ever made!"

Vana felt just a little disappointed.

"Then you did not know her until she was married? I wanted so much to hear if you had met any of her relations. You know she must have had relations, and they would love her memory, and like to talk to me about her."

A strange, dusky flush rose to the man's face at the innocent words.

"I never knew her before she was Dorothy Tempest," he answered; "but I knew her and—and your father very well, and I wanted to tell you so. I am getting an old man now. There are no children in my home. If ever you should be in any trouble, Vana, if ever you should need a friend, I want you to remember that for your mother's sake I would do all I could to help you. Do not tell your uncle of this talk. He does not know of my intimacy with your parents. Only remember, if ever a day comes that you need a friend, I—I shall be ready."

She smiled at him gently, a little, sad, weary smile.

"It is very kind of you, Mr. Lester, but I shall not be alone much longer. I—I am going to be married."

There was neither joy nor elation in her tone, she just stated the fact as a casual piece of information.

She never blushed. It seemed to her just a piece of news that might interest him. She spoke as coolly as though she had said, "I am going on a visit."

His eyes caught sight of the beautiful ring on her finger, and he remembered the rumours he had heard.

"That is great news. And are you happy?"

Vana somewhat altered the question in her reply.

"Mr. Devenish is very good and true," she said, simply; "and I can trust him perfectly. I have no secret from him, Mr. Lester. May I tell him what you have said?"

There was a moment's hesitation, and then he took her hand.

"When you are his wife, Vana, tell him what you will, and ask him if he will let you wear this sometimes for the sake of one who loved your mother."

He went out quite suddenly and joined Sir Basil. As he left the drawing-room Vana heard the door close on them, but she did not move. She felt as though the stir of family life, her aunt's directions, and the children's chatter would jar on her.

She wanted a few moments to think quietly over what had happened.

At last, after months of weary waiting, she had met some one who knew and loved her mother!

Never in all the days of their lonely life together in France had Mrs. Tempest spoken to her daughter of her past life.

She would tell Vana stories of London and its wonders, and of the beauties of English country life, but of her own past never a word.

Had she been rich or poor? the child of a

wealthy merchant or a poverty-stricken clerk?—her daughter knew not.

Dorothea had told her child she had been a governess, and in her first situation met her husband, that was all.

And now out of the mystery of the past there came a voice; now some one had actually touched Vana's hand who had known and loved her mother!

The girl had heard a great deal of Mr. Lester from his relations. She knew that he had led a life apart, that, until his marriage—when he was well on in years—they had heard little about him.

The first suspicion that struck Vana was that he was her grandfather—that he had cast off her mother for some rash marriage; but she soon dismissed this as an idle fancy.

Her Uncle James was not the sort of man to have despised and neglected his sister-in-law had she been one of the Lester family.

Besides, this old gentleman himself said in speaking of Vana's mother, "I never knew her before she was Dorothy Tempest."

No, this was a mistake. Perhaps he had been a visitor at the house where her mother was governess.

Well, she might never know just what his acquaintance with Mrs. Tempest had been; but, at any rate, this interview had been a link with Vana's past.

She felt less dreary and less sorrowful.

She held the trinket he had given her near the lamp and looked at it. It was a ring of rich dead gold, set with opals; inside was the quaint inscription, "For always," followed by the name Dorothea. It set her wondering. Had this ring ever belonged to her mother, and if so, how had it passed to her? Percy Lester's keeping? Vana looked it up among her treasures before she went to join her aunt and the children at tea.

They talked a great deal of the Lesters. It was natural, perhaps. The tragedy of Sir George's death had well-nigh convulsed Vale Lester. It was only the day before that he had been laid in his grave. The woman Sharpe was still at large, in spite of the handsome reward offered for her, apprehension, and the fact that the coroner's jury had returned a verdict of wilful murder against her, and the magistrates had issued a warrant for her arrest.

"They'll not find her yet awhile," said the Vicar, who fancied himself a first-rate detective spoilt by fate. "I could have told Sir Basil so. That woman was too clever to do a thing by halves. Depend upon it, she was pretty well disguised while at the Court, and the parson who left Dereham would not answer in any way to the descriptions on the handbills."

"Did they trace her to Dereham?" asked his wife.

"Yes; she actually went to the dentist; but he was very busy, so she promised to return in an hour. That is where the clue fails; they are ready at the railway station to swear that no one answering Sharpe's description left the station. They perfectly remember her arrival and her making very particular inquiry about the return trains. All the cab drivers have been questioned, but deny having taken such a fare. The confectioners and bakers say they sold no refreshment to any one answering to the description; in fact, as I said before, the clue fails at the dentist's door."

"Perhaps she never left Dereham at all?" suggested Mrs. Tempest, sensibly.

The Vicar shook his head.

"She'd not dare to stay. Why, bless me, Hephzibah, can't you see people would be too anxious to secure the reward, not to suspect any stranger? and it's a small place, where all the regular inhabitants and their friends are known. No, depend upon it, Mrs. Sharpe got out of Dereham before her victim died. There is only one hopeful thing about it: she might dye her hair and paint her face, but there's one thing she can't disguise—her height. She was so unusually tall; she would be remarked anywhere. In that one thing lies our chance of finding her."

"But even then," said Vana, slowly, "I can't see how they can prove it against her. What object could she have in causing Sir George's death?"

Mr. Tempest shook his head.

"There's some one else in it," he said, oracularly. "This woman was only the tool. Perhaps when she finds herself in danger of hanging she'll turn Queen's evidence, and reveal who tempted her to do it. Dr. Jebb declares the poison was administered in the most scientific manner, and in the minutest doses. Depend upon it, no ignorant woman devised that plan."

Sir Basil went back to Ireland, and a great gloom settled down on Vale Lester. Lady Lester and her daughter, in their deep mourning garments, came to church, the widow's pale face telling how heavily the blow had fallen on her; the household at the Court, reduced to the smallest possible limit, the strict economy already instituted in every department—all marked the change.

One thing surprised Vale Lester: the engagement between Sir Basil and Miss Devrenx was not formally announced. Fenella was back at Miss Deborah's, a little paler and a little graver than before she went to Devonshire, but there was no word spoken of her marriage with the young Baronet. Indeed, her intimacy with the family at the Court seemed to have decreased.

She often made an excuse to avoid accompanying Miss Deborah in her frequent visits to her sister-in-law, and never pressed the girls to come to her. The old maid's darling seemed out of tune in those dull, dreary autumn days.

Miss Deborah declared the shock of the tragedy had been too much for dear Fenella, the child was so sensitive. Once she and Vana Tempest met face to face, but the keenest spectator could have learned nothing from that meeting.

Fenella bowed with just that dash of condescension fitting the difference in their positions, and Vana returned the greeting with the strangely serious look that had grown so natural to her in the last few months.

Miss Deborah was not at all pleased at the tardiness of Sir Basil's wooing.

"I think he is treating you badly, child," she said, frankly to her favourite. "All the world knows there were not two years between me and poor George. Susan was always a sickly creature, and Percy is old before his time. Humanely speaking, Simon's fortune must come to you or Basil. It is paying you a bad compliment to delay. The boy needs money. He has given up every penny of his patrimony to his mother, not that I blame him for that, but it is time he thought of himself."

Miss Deborah did more than hint. She wrote to her nephew very kindly, telling him that if he was still in the same mind as when he first proposed to Fenella, she did not think any grief for his father's death should put off their engagement.

While Sir George's murderer remained unpunished, she could well understand he felt it no time for wedding bells, but she thought for both their sakes it was better their position should be clearly understood.

Basil waited some time before he answered his aunt; then he sent two letters, one to her and the second to Fenella. The latter was a simple manly statement of his readiness to marry her, if knowing his past disappointment, she was yet willing to trust her happiness in his hands.

This old passion he told her was cured. Vana's perfidy had made him thankful for his escape, but he did not feel it in him ever again to make an enthusiastic lover. If complete confidence and true liking would suffice, Fenella might trust him entirely. He would study her happiness and consult her wishes in all things.

"He will give me all but love, and that he denies me," muttered Miss Devrenx, as she read the letter; "but I shall win his heart in

time. He cannot keep constant for ever to that fair-haired child. Oh, my darling, you must turn to me in time. Love such as mine must win for itself a return. We will be happy, Basil, and forget the dark clouds which so nearly parted us."

She wrote a very simple answer to her lover, only two lines, and yet they decided the fate of two lives.

"I can bear anything with you."

Miss Deborah also answered Basil's letter, and no doubt the old maid gave some liberal promise for the future, since she told Fenella with a smile she thought after all her Irish home would be ready by the time the June roses were in bloom.

"June is the month of all others for a wedding," she said, cheerfully. "I don't think I could bear for you to be married in winter, like poor little Vana Tempest."

Poor little Vana!

She was going to marry five thousand a year!

Her future husband fairly worshipped her, and was a man of whose love any girl might have been proud; and yet in these December days almost all Vale Lester spoke of the vicar's niece as "Poor little Vana!" for she looked to them like one fading away.

The round, girlish face had grown wan and pale; the beautiful dark eyes seemed almost too large for it. Her laugh was never heard; and often and often when her aunt spoke to her suddenly she would start as though awakened from a dream.

Poor little Vana!

She was waking up to the knowledge of her mistake.

She had loved Basil Lester almost as her life, had worshipped him with all the first fervour of her heart. When she lost him, when his falseness broke all tie between them, it seemed to Vana that nothing mattered any more.

The rest of her life was blighted; she did not care how she spent it.

In this mood she listened to David Devenish's proposal.

She really meant to marry him, she never pretended that she loved him, but she let him go away believing she would be his wife. And now the spell was broken. Vana had awoke again. Her poor, tortured heart had lost its numbness, and could feel and suffer once again.

Alas! alas! The first consciousness of this she had was in the agony with which she began to look forward to David's coming.

In a fortnight after her chance meeting with Basil Lester she knew that of all things on earth she dreaded most was her wedding-day.

Mr. Devenish was coming in less than three weeks, and he had her promise, at least, her silence up to now amounted to a promise.

He was coming as her lover, her future husband, and there was no spark of love for him in her heart!

In her miserable apathy, in her half-stunned state, it had seemed to matter little what became of her, and now she would have given anything, everything, just for her freedom.

A veil seemed to fall from her eyes, and she knew the truth—that a marriage without love is the most abject bondage, the most complete slavery.

A husband may be tenderness itself, but a love to which one can offer no return is in itself a heavy burden.

David might consult her will, and strive to please her in all things, but he could not alter this—that for all time she was tied to him.

For all time!

In youth and age, in sunshine and tempest, in sickness and health, waking and sleeping, she would never belong to herself any more! she would have no future apart from him!

She had done it willingly. She had taken up the yoke herself, but at the time trouble had deadened her poor heart to all feeling save loneliness.

It had seemed to her good to belong to one so good and true as Mr. Devenish; and now the spell was broken, and she knew life at his side would be one long torture.

While the world lasts there will be trouble. While love endures some of us will give our hearts in vain. Better, then, try and face the pain bravely, better fill the void with honest work rather than rashly grasp at the first chance of change that comes to us.

Vana Tempest was the least mercenary of women. Love, and love only, was needed to make her happy, and yet she had signed away her whole future.

If only Mr. Devenish would set her free! She dared not ask it of him. The girl's nature was so true, she could not bring herself to break her word. But, oh! if anything should rescue her! If her lover could only see for himself how little to be desired was an unloving wife. If his relations or friends would only interfere.

Vana Tempest prayed with the tears raining down her cheeks that something, no matter what, might even yet, at the eleventh hour, set her free.

And the prayer was granted.

(To be continued.)

## WHEN SHALL WE TWO MEET AGAIN?

—O—

### CHAPTER XXVIII.

#### A DREAM!

"THERE is a very peculiar smell in the room," said Sir Septimus Benson, sniffing suspiciously. "May I ask if you have been trying any experiments?"

"Yes, I've been trying to burn down the house," said Treherne, calmly, who really imagined that the surgeon would be ready to suspect him of incendiarism or any other crime. "You see how the matting is singed."

"I suppose you upset the lamp; but it was a narrow escape, especially for Sir Thomas."

"Scarcely, as I was in the room; and I should have lugged him out at the first suspicion of danger. Perhaps you imagine that I should have left him to be burned alive?" looking at his grave face with resentful eyes.

"My dear sir, I never trust to my imagination. If Lady Dacre thinks it best to leave her husband in your hands, I've no doubt that she has good reason for doing so. Now, the question is, what is the matter with the patient? I've given up my night's rest in order to find out, being rather alarmed by the terms of the telegram."

Ronald gave a short account of the accident, to which Sir Septimus listened attentively, putting in a few sharp questions here and there.

Their talk took place in the hall—for Weston, who had had a fruitless search after the man who had come to the window, had been told to remove the matting as noiselessly as possible, and to replace it with a carpet from one of the other rooms.

Jennings—Sir Thomas's valet, who was to take the last half of the night-watch—assisted him, and they were so quiet in their movements that the sick man was not disturbed.

"Might I ask what induced Sir Thomas to go into the mine?" inquired Sir Septimus, when he had heard all that it was important for him to know.

"Anxiety for my safety, incredible as it may seem," said Treherne, briefly.

"Very curious," said the surgeon, quietly. "Do you mean to say that Sir Thomas has taken a fancy to you?"

"An absurd fancy!" he replied, impatiently. "He would like me to be with him all day and night, but fortunately I've my work to attend to in the day-time."

"And when do you propose to take your



night's rest?" studying him as if he were the most puzzling specimen of humanity that he had ever seen.

"When I can get it," with a short laugh. "I must be off in good time to the mine."

"Then, pray go at once. As soon as those men have arranged the room I shall go into Sir Thomas, and very likely take a snooze in an arm-chair. I'm accustomed to that sort of thing, you know," said the surgeon, with a smile.

"What a brute I am! I never thought of it. You must be starving!" exclaimed Treherne, starting up, on hospitality intent.

"I'm nothing of the sort. Give me a glass of sherry and a biscuit, and take the same yourself, or you will never sleep. Let me tell you that you look as if you had taken no care of yourself for a long time," he said, gravely. "Why should I?" with an impatient sigh.

"Somebody else must answer that question," replied Sir Septimus, dryly.

Something in his tone made Treherne look at him sharply, but the surgeon's face was as impassive as a mask.

The wine was fetched and some cold ham, etc., but Treherne slipped away as soon as he could to his own room.

When he was alone he pulled the bit of cloth out of his pocket that Ponto had brought back as the only fruit of his reconnaissance, and examined it minutely.

It was evidently a bit torn out of a man's trousers, and Ponto's jaws had held on to it so firmly that the lining had come away with it.

It was not corduroy, but a piece of tweed, with a check pattern in brown and white, such as any man might pick up in one of the slop-shops at Plymouth.

He determined to keep his eyes open for the future, but he was afraid that this identical pair of trousers might have been so damaged that it would never be worn again. In that case it might be almost impossible to identify the former wearer; and if he were found, it was ten chances to one that he was only an emissary for someone else.

Treherne looked hard at the scrap of paper which he had kept in his waistcoat-pocket till he should find an opportunity of placing it in Sir Thomas's hands.

The writing was feigned; but somehow there was something about it which struck him as rather familiar.

He could fancy that he had received several letters in the original hand-writing; but though he racked his brains he could not possibly remember to whom the writing belonged.

If his surmise was correct the stab in the dark must have come from some one who passed as his friend; but he rejected the idea with scorn.

He could not suspect any one of his friends of so base a treachery. Loyal to the core himself, he was slow to believe in the disloyalty of any one else.

He had but a few hours to rest in, and his sleep was destroyed by agitating thoughts, as well as by the remembrance that some what might he must be up and away before Lady Daore arrived.

It seemed as if he had only just closed his eyes when Weston came in with the hot water, and though he felt inclined to abuse him for disturbing him, he was obliged to keep his irritation to himself, as he had scolded him for not calling him the morning before.

As soon as he was down he went into Sir Thomas's room determined to deliver up the paper before Sir Septimus's eyes, in order that he might not be suspected of intentionally suppressing it.

The surgeon was not there. Jennings was tidying up with noiseless steps and hands, and the patient was fast asleep—his harsh features unredeemed by any softening expression.

"Perhaps he is thinking of Trevanion," thought Ronald, as he stood there, hesitating, with the important scrap of paper in his

hand, "and this little note may point his suspicion in the right direction. I wish I had never found it."

He had very nearly decided to wait, at least till he came back in the evening; but, just at that moment, he heard a step, and looking round saw the surgeon standing in the doorway, and watching him with a peculiar smile upon his lips.

"Good morning, Mr. Treherne!" he said, in a low, but distinct voice. "Events repeat themselves. Last night I found you in the same attitude with, I verily believe, the same piece of paper in your hand. If you were a doctor I should think it was a prescription for the patient, and beg to see it."

In an instant Treherne's mind was made up, and he was determined to show the surgeon that he was going to deliver it as he said he would.

"Good morning, Sir Septimus!" he answered, cheerfully. "If this is a prescription I am not answerable for it; but I fancy it will have a rousing effect."

"Then I forbid you to deliver it," unconsciously raising his voice as he stepped forward.

"Eh! what's that? A letter? Give it me at once!" said Sir Thomas, wide awake, and ready to oppose all the world in a minute.

The two men looked at each other, and could not repress a smile; then Treherne stooped and laid the little note—as powerful for evil as a serpent's sting—in the clawlike fingers.

And having committed this act of folly, he drew himself up, looked quite proud of himself, and flashed a glance of defiance at the surgeon. The colour rushed to the latter's face, and he came forward, hastily.

"Sir Thomas," he said, sharply, "you had better give that note to me. I assure you that it is only a piece of nonsense—and—and—it will worry your mind."

"Nonsense doesn't worry the mind," replied the Baronet, weak but combative. "It looks uninviting, so I'll put it by, and look at it presently." He slipped it under his pillow with a sardonic smile, which changed as he met Treherne's eye. "Now, don't hurry off, Sir Septimus will have done with me directly."

"I will leave you with Sir Septimus, and go and have my breakfast," said Treherne, hastily; "you have had yours, I believe?"

He had given special orders that the surgeon was to have his breakfast when he liked, as he was anxious to avoid another *été-à-été* with him, and now, in spite of the Baronet's remonstrances, he left the two together.

If he had done a foolish thing he told himself that he could not help it. No man had the right to stop another man's letter, unless he were in an official position, with authority to keep it back because of its treasonable nature, or anything of that kind.

By the merest chance it had fallen into his hands, and he certainly would have been taking a dishonourable advantage of his position as Sir Thomas's nurse if he had kept it back or destroyed it.

Of course this would not be the last step of his secret enemy, whoever he might be. This warning, no doubt, came from the same individual who had told Sir Thomas that Trevanion was in the Castle on the day of the dance, and soon he would not be content with shooting from behind a hedge, but would come out in the face of day and denounce him.

Well, it must come sooner or later, and he was prepared for the worst. He had braved so many dangers out in Africa without flinching, but now he was conscious of a sinking of the heart.

It was not for himself he feared, but when the trial came on, who would believe that Cyrilla Daore had never recognised him as her former lover?

Who would credit that with a thousand opportunities of meeting they had never voluntarily come where the one was likely to see the other, and never breathed one word of

the love which lay like a hidden jewel in the depths of their hearts?

The world would laugh, shrug its shoulders, and say, "Is it likely?" and nobody could answer "yes."

Treherne gave a thistle a savage cut which sent its head flying over the purple heather, as he thought of it.

It was all poor old Gordon's fault. If he had only let him follow his instinct in the first instance, he would now be thousands of miles away from England, Cyrilla's golden head would have been safe from the soiling hand of shame, and he would have been forgotten at Mountsorrel.

Just as he was thinking of her the Daore's purple and gold liveries came in sight, and to add to his surprise, the coachman pulled up his spirited pair of chestnuts, and Lady Daore beckoned to him to come to the window.

"Excuse me for stopping you," she said, shyly, with the loveliest rose tint on her cheeks, "but I had such a horrible dream last night, that I can't get it out of my head. How is my husband?"

"As well as can be expected after rather a disturbed night," said Treherne, standing bare-headed in the sun. "Somebody came to the window with a letter. I jumped up to see who it was, and upset the table and lamp, made an awful noise, and nearly set the whole place on fire. But I think you'll find it all right now, and Sir Septimus is there waiting for Adams."

"I wish I had brought him with me."

Seeing that she still had a troubled look on her lovely face, he said kindly,—

"Tell me your dream, and then you'll be able to forget it. It will weigh on your mind till you do."

"I—I think I will get out and walk," she said, in a low voice, with a slight smile as she glanced towards the footman who was standing close by.

She could not tell her dream with that man in livery to listen. Treherne gave her his hand to help her out, but her fingers rested as lightly on it as a butterfly's wing.

She dismissed the carriage, and turned towards the Tower, with Ronald by her side. Ronald, who had made up his mind never to speak to her again if he could help it! But he excused himself now on the plea that he had only proposed it for her sake, knowing that she would find no one at the Tower to whom she could disburthen her mind.

"Well, Lady Daore," he said, interrogatively, feeling as if he were bound to seem in a hurry, though his sense of hurry always became passive when in her society, "am I to hear the dream?"

"It will seem nothing to tell," turning to him impulsively, for she was very anxious that he should take the dream as a warning. "I dreamt that all your men were gathered round you, as if to defend you, but you wouldn't let them get in front, you would step forward though I tried to call out to you to go back and hide. But the more I tried to attract your attention the more impossible it was," her voice shaking with the remembrance of it, "all my voice went from me. I could only give the weakest whisper, and you—and you," hesitating.

"And what did I do?" he asked, with one swift downward glance into her face.

"You would only look up at me and smile. Don't laugh, because it was so terrible. My husband took a revolver out of his coat, and pointed it straight at your heart. I tried to catch hold of his arm, but I was paralysed. Colonel Gordon, who looked half mad, called out to me, 'This is all your fault,' and just as the pistol went off, Sir Thomas staggered back, and I woke. Don't you think it means something?" looking up at him for once with earnest, anxious eyes, forgetful of everything but her great wish to warn him of possible danger.

Those hazel eyes seemed to dazzle him. He paused his hand across his forehead.

"Nothing, nothing," he said, hoarsely,

"because, you see, Lady Dacre, you would never take such an interest in a stranger like me!"

She did not answer, but stood there like a statue, only with quivering lips, and eyes that ventured one upward glance, then fell with drooping lashes on burning cheeks. Taking off his hat, he left her with a hurried exhortation, the veins in his temples throbbing, his heart beating as if it would burst from his breast.

Had she recognised him? The question shot through his brain like a flash of lightning, but he cried out mentally, "No, no, it's quite impossible!" and just at that moment who should ride up but Kitty, mounted on one of Lord Wildgrave's best horses, with a smile upon her pretty face, and a deep sense of penitence in her passionate heart.

But at the sight of the two before her, at the sight of their agitated faces as she glanced from the one to the other, her penitence vanished like the wind.

Treherne gave her an absent bow, which did not improve matters, and walked on in desperate haste. Whilst she rode quickly up to the Tower, her good intentions turned into evil.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A WOMAN'S TONGUE.

"Is that Lady Dacre?" asked Sir Septimus Benson appearing at the door of Sir Thomas's bed-room, as Kitty rode up to the outer one.

"No," she called out, loud enough to be heard by the patient as well as the surgeon. "I have just seen Lady Dacre talking to Mr. Treherne down there," with a nod of her head in the direction of the mine. "I dare say she will be here before long. How is poor Sir Thomas?"

"Oh, you little vixen!" was the surgeon's mental comment, as he asked her at Sir Thomas's suggestion if she would mind coming in to speak to him for a minute.

She slipped off her saddle directly, and was presently seated by the side of the bed in the same chair that Treherne had occupied during the night. She looked round the room with curious eyes, noting certain familiar objects, such as a silver mounted yastaghan—a pipe of fanciful construction given him by a Zulu chief, a string of dried seeds which an old Boer woman had thrust into the young Englishman's hand as a charm against death, etc., etc.; but her heart never softened, as they only awakened reminiscences of her own wild and mistaken love for their owner.

"I don't think you could have seen my wife talking to Treherne," said Sir Thomas in his querulous tone, as soon as he had answered sympathetic inquiries after his health, "for he was in such a desperate hurry that I couldn't get half a word out of him."

"Did you ever find him in too much of a hurry to speak to Lady Dacre?" looking down at the riding whip which she held in her hand.

"That I have," was the unexpected answer. "He won't come near me in the day-time, because Cyrilla has taken it into her head to nurse me."

"He doesn't mind how long he talks to her outside. I saw them yesterday, and again to-day."

"I daresay she had a lot of questions to ask him about me. She is a very good wife. I haven't a word to say against her."

Kitty was much annoyed at finding all her shots miss fire. The man was a sort of immovable hippopotamus, whom it was impossible to stir up. Her time she felt was short, for the doctor might come in again at any moment, and Lady Dacre was probably in the act of climbing up the hill.

"Mr. Treherne is one of the handsomest men I ever saw," she said significantly; but again Sir Thomas disappointed her.

"You women think so much about a fellow's looks," he said, calmly. "I should

think just the same of Treherne if his nose were as flat as a pancake."

"But Lady Dacre wouldn't—she admires him immensely," eagerly, with a spiteful flash in her eyes, as she heard a step outside.

"How do you know that?" said Sir Thomas slowly, turning his head as far as he dared in order to watch her face.

"Oh! I've seen it in her eyes when she has been looking at him."

"I never have," frowning. The steps came nearer. She leaned forward and said almost in a whisper,

"Of course you wouldn't. Wives don't let their husbands see everything." And then she rose from her seat, and looked up, with a bland smile, for Lady Dacre, pale but perfectly composed, was standing in the doorway. "I know you must be dying to talk to poor Sir Thomas, so I won't stop. What have you done with Mr. Treherne. I've brought him a message from Wilfred."

"If you want to deliver it, you had better go to the mine. I fancy you saw him as well as I did hurrying in that direction," said Cyrilla, rather haughtily, as she remembered some of Mrs. Gifford's stinging speeches of the day before.

"I don't know about the hurry. I saw him dawdling along the road, and I did not wonder, when he had Lady Dacre for his companion! Good-bye!"

She flashed one glance at Cyrilla's face, where the crimson blood had rushed to cheek and brow, and nodding, brightly to Sir Thomas, got on her horse and rode off—first charming, Weston by the sweetness of her smile, as she thanked him for holding it—for Kitty was always sweet and charming to those who did not get in her way.

Sir Septimus Benson was exceedingly cross at the non-arrival of Dr. Adams. And yet he might have been quite sure that his confidence was kept by some other serious case of illness which he could not leave, and therefore that the delay was no fault of the worthy doctor's. And Sir Thomas was crosser than his poor wife had ever known him to be before, for no apparent reason, except that Treherne had gone off too quickly in the morning.

"But surely you can't be angry with him for that?" she ventured to remonstrate, "when he was with you nearly the whole night long."

"Oh, of course you take his part," he said, huffily, to her great surprise, for he had often complained that she did not appreciate him half enough. "What made you so late this morning?"

"Was I late? I got out of the carriage, and walked a little way, perhaps that delayed me," she said, innocently, not wanting to hide the fact that she had met Treherne, but still not thinking it necessary to mention it.

In an instant her husband's suspicions were aroused.

"I thought perhaps you had met some one on the road?" he said, carelessly, but with his hawk-like eyes fixed upon her face.

"Nobody but Mr. Treherne, and I stopped to ask him how you were."

"Vastly kind of you," he said, with bitter sarcasm. "I suppose it did not occur to you that you could ascertain that fact just as well by hurrying up in the carriage?"

"He had been nursing you, therefore he would know better than anyone else. What is the matter, Thomas? Are you sure that you don't feel worse?" she asked, with tender solicitude, although her husband at that moment looked especially unattractive, for his chin was unshaven, and his iron-grey locks had been ruffled by constant contact with the pillow.

"Much anyone would care if I were!" he answered, ungratefully; but further amenities were stopped by the entrance of Sir Septimus, followed by the long expected Dr. Adams.

He had already excused himself for the delay by saying that he was in attendance on a dying patient, whom it was impossible to

leave; but he still looked flustered and annoyed at having been obliged to keep the great surgeon waiting.

Cyrilla led the doctors to their consultation, and went and sat upon the seat which Wilfred had been so fond of.

From it there was a lovely view over the sea and along the coast for many miles.

Wooded headlands ran out into the waves, and secluded villages were buried in the hollows between them; but every here and there the grey tower of a church showed up above the tops of the tallest pines like a glimpse of Heaven amongst the pleasures and sorrows of life.

"Ah!" she thought, with hands clasped on her lap. "Is there no peace for me except in the grass?"

Already she had striven so hard to do her duty that morning, and had only been snubbed for her pains. And the old aching pain had come back to her heart, and the sorrow of the past seemed to rise up and crush her.

Would there never be an end to her trials except on the other side of the stream of death? Why were other women's lives so much fairer than her own? she asked in wild regret; but the only answer was the splash of the waves and the twittering of the birds in a thicket.

Presently she became aware that somebody was advancing towards the house. And as she recognised Jacob Smith, the detective, all her faculties were on the alert in an instant.

She rose from her seat, and crossing the lawn quickly, reached the front door at the same time as he did.

Smith, if he had expressed his honest sentiments, would have wished her ladyship at Jericho, or another place at a safe distance from England; but as frankness is not the distinguishing characteristic of men in his line of business, he dissembled, and, raising his hat respectfully, asked if he could have a few minutes' talk with Sir Thomas.

"Not on any account," said Cyrilla, promptly. "Sir Thomas is still very ill, and the doctor says he must be kept very quiet."

"I'd undertake not to say more than half a dozen words, my lady; and I assure you they would act more as a tonic than anything else," Smith said, earnestly, trying to edge his way to the door, which was, however, inexorably blocked by Lady Dacre's graceful figure.

"And, for all I know, a tonic might be the worst thing for him, Mr. Smith," she said, gravely. "However, there are two doctors with him now, so that it is useless to discuss the subject. If you have any message for him, I shall be happy to deliver it."

There was a sudden eagerness in her face which did not escape the detective's eyes, and made him immediately shut up as tight as an oyster.

A slight smile hovered round the corners of his mouth as he thought of the handsome man whom he was bent on running down, and the lady who was so much interested in him.

He had a vulgar mind, and as he was constantly watching the seamy side of human nature, it seemed quite natural to him that this girl with the lovely face should be on the side of a fascinating young man like Mr. Treherne, instead of taking the part of a tiresome old fogey like Sir Thomas Dacre.

He fixed that odd left eye of his on her face, and said, quietly,—

"I'm ever so much obliged to you, my lady, but this is a matter for Sir Thomas alone. I've no right to speak of it to anyone else."

Cyrilla drew herself up haughtily.

"My husband has no secrets from me, Mr. Smith," she said, with a haughty look.

"The more fool he!" was Mr. Smith's mental rejoinder. "That wouldn't excuse me for telling them to you, my lady," he said, aloud. "Sir Thomas can do as he likes about his own affairs, but I'm bound to act up to my sense of duty."

"Then I cannot tell you how long you will have to wait. Sir Thomas is in a very critical state; but as soon as he can be moved we



shall take him to Mountsorrell, so you had better bring your news to him there," said Cyrilla, congratulating herself on her own cleverness, for she knew how important it was to get the detective out of the neighbourhood.

Of course her motives were as patent to him as possible, and he was more convinced than ever that Treherne was the man.

He had a trump card in his pocket, and he knew that it was necessary to play it as soon as possible; but he did not dare to give it into the small hand which would be too ready to take it, and equally ready to throw it into the fire as soon as his back was turned.

"It is dangerous to wait so long, and I won't disguise it from you," shaking his head sentimentally; "but I suppose you are willing to take the responsibility on your own shoulders, my lady?"

"Certainly I am. My husband will be very anxious to see you as soon as he is well enough." Then she gave a graceful bend of her head in sign of dismissal, and with a triumphant smile watched the detective depart.

"So you have sent him off?" said Sir Septimus's voice close behind her. "You fancy that you have got rid of him, but he will come back as soon as the coast is clear, and Sir Thomas will know all about it before to-morrow morning."

She turned upon him defiantly.

"You've no right to think I've any motive in this but anxiety for my husband."

The surgeon raised his grave, inscrutable eyes, and looked her straight in the face.

"If you had another I should be the last man to blame you. You are young, beautiful, charming, all that some men care for. It would be too much to expect that you should be true as well."

She forgot to resent the rudeness in the shock that the accusation gave to her sensitive conscience.

"As there is a Heaven above us," she said, in a low, intense voice, "I have been true to my husband through it all."

"You think you have, and that is always enough for a woman," he said, slowly; "but if I told you that either Sir Thomas or that fellow down in the mine should die to-morrow and bade you choose, which would it be?"

She turned white to the very lips.

"I should do my duty," she said, after a long pause.

"Would it be your duty to cut off that young life, so rich in all grand possibilities for the future, so full of courage and intellect and strength of will, in order to save an elderly individual, who will probably be an invalid for the rest of his weary existence?"

Her face went like that of a martyr, but she answered steadily.

"Yes. My husband before everything."

And he—the man of the world—who had lost his trust in women before the beard had grown upon his chin, looked into Lady Dacre's face, and reading its expression aright, said in a low voice.

"I believe you would. You are one in a thousand."

### CHAPTER XXX.

"AH! THEN, I'M DONE FOR!"

"BEWARE of the man you call your friend!" Those were the words which were ringing in Sir Thomas's head all day, and confusing his poor brain.

They could only apply to Ronald Treherne, the man whom he had singled out from all others to be his special favourite.

He had really thrust his friendship upon him in a way that was entirely contrary to his usual habit, and Treherne had always repulsed him. And yet, with a softening smile, he thought that the fellow could only have been humbugging, for he was always ready to do him any service that was possible.

It was Treherne who came to look for him

in the mine, although he was unfit for any exertion at the moment; it was Treherne who offered his house as an asylum for him in his precarious state. It was Treherne who was ready to sacrifice his night's rest for him to nurse him with the tenderness of a woman, and to be at his beck and call like a faithful servant.

And yet this was the man whom he was called upon to doubt. Impossible! He never knew a face before that showed a man's character more clearly.

Truth shone out of his large blue eyes, frankly and fearlessly as in those of a plucky child's.

It was a face that had taken him by storm in a way that was unprecedented in his usually unimpulsive nature, and he had felt from the first that he could trust this stranger more completely than one of his most tried friends.

Was it likely that he, a keen-witted man of the world, not over ready to trust anything or anybody—a man utterly without a scrap of foolish sentimentality in his disposition—could have been duped from the first?

He laughed the idea to scorn, tried to turn over on to his left side, was irritated by the failure to get into a more comfortable position, and lay frowning and flushed, ready for any unpleasant thought that chose to come and plague him.

Cyrilla sat in the high-backed chair, looking up every now and then with her gentle eyes, wondering why her husband looked so angry, and why he remained so obstinately silent, and all the while Kitty's words came like little wasp stings back to his remembrance.

Lady Dacre admired Treherne immensely. "He never seemed in a hurry when he was talking to her outside. Wives never let their husbands see everything."

This offer of his house, which sounded so kind and generous, might after all be a plant from the beginning.

To have the invalid husband lodged under his roof would give him a thousand opportunities of meeting his wife—opportunities which Treherne would never have if they were both at Mountsorrell.

But no, if this was the result of a horrible plot Treherne would be an utter scoundrel, and that he could never bring himself to believe. Still, now he came to think of it, it was dangerous for him to be thrown so much with a woman of such personal beauty. His restless thoughts went to that night of the ball.

Treherne had only asked his wife to dance with him at his own instigation, but once having broken the ice he did not leave her side for an hour at least. Perhaps he was irresistibly attracted by her, and that was why he so persistently avoided Mountsorrell. Perhaps—oh! what was the good of worrying his brains about it when he was tied by the leg, and could not stir a step?

"Cyrilla," he said, abruptly, "I should like you to stay with me to-night instead of Treherne. The poor fellow will be quite worn out."

"Very well, just as you like; but I must write and tell him so," the colour rushing into her cheeks at the thought of watching together by her husband's side for the long, quiet hours of the night.

That was a position that could not be borne, and she rose at once to get pen and ink.

Sir Thomas noted that sudden flush, and speculated over it uneasily.

"Give me a pencil and a bit of paper," he said, sharply. "I'll try and scrawl a few lines myself. It will come better from me than you."

"Are you sure that it won't be bad for you?" looking anxiously at his flushed face, and wondering uneasily if he were really worse and were keeping it back from her.

"Stuff and nonsense!" contemptuously, as he took hold of the pencil with very shaky fingers. "If it were I should do it all the same. Ring the bell for Jennings!"

When Jennings—a respectable-looking man,

with a thin face, colourless eyes, and a large mouth—came into the room, he was told to take the note to Mr. Treherne at once, either at the mine or at Woodlands.

"You can have the cart which is here, and mind there's no mistake!" said his master, imperatively.

The valet withdrew, and Cyrilla offered to read out.

"No. You can make yourself agreeable to everyone else, so why shouldn't you try it on with your husband?" he said, crossly.

"But I come here every day and see nobody," she answered, with a smile. "So what is there to talk about? We've discussed the paper," looking towards the *Times* which she had read out for more than an hour before luncheon.

"If a visitor came in your tongue would be wagging like a pendulum, but, of course, you've nothing to say to me," with a fretful sigh.

Cyrilla sighed, not fretfully, but with utter weariness of spirit. Was she to endure this till two o'clock in the morning, when Jennings would come to relieve her? And when her watch was over what was she to do with herself? Pass the rest of the night in a chair in the hall, waiting for the daylight to creep in through the chinks of the shutters?

There was nobody to make arrangements for her comfort. Her husband had not thought of it, and the one who would have turned the house upside down, if necessary, to accommodate her, would not be there till the morrow night.

"After all, reading is better than this dull work. You had better get a novel with some spice in it—if you can only find one. No milk and water for me," said Sir Thomas, anxious to get away from his troublesome thoughts.

Cyrilla took up one by a well-known author from amongst a number which Treherne, with his usual forethought, had sent for from Mudie.

It was a book of wild adventures in Persia, and Sir Thomas forgot some of his own troubles in listening to those of the hero.

Treherne came out of the mine about half-past six, took off the large blue spectacles, which it was necessary for everyone to wear in the adits whilst work was going on, to prevent splinters from the rock or scraps of dust from getting into the eyes, and looked round for his horse, which Weston was holding at a little distance.

"Now, Treherne, you are not going off to Woodlands," Lord Wildgrave called out, looking down from his high dog cart. "I'm going to carry you off a prisoner. Don't say 'No!'"

"It's awfully good of you to ask me," a bright smile on his face as he raised his hat, "but I'm as black as a nigger, and I've got to be with Sir Thomas to-night."

"We've plenty of soap and water, as well as a suit of your dress clothes up at the Castle, and that old curmudgeon can very well be left to the care of his own man."

Treherne shook his head.

"I said I would, so I must be there, thank you all the same."

"Well, if you must, I'll tell them to put Fleetwood in the cart, and he will take you over the ground in no time. Come, get up. I'll take no refusal. Seriously, Wilfred wants you, and I'm not quite comfortable about the boy," said the Earl, gravely.

Not another word was necessary.

Of course, if he were wanted, he would go, but he couldn't help looking at his dusty clothes with a rueful glance.

Lord Wildgrave laughed.

"Not a soul shall see you till you are quite presentable. I'll drop you at the back door, and you shall creep up to your room like a burglar."

Colonel Gordon came out, and, seeing Treherne, getting into the cart, he called out.

"Glad you are taking him away, Wildgrave. He makes himself a perfect slave to

our old friend up there," with a jerk of his head towards the Tower.

"Hard work to get him; but I couldn't tempt you, too?"

"Not to-night, thanks. Verreker dines with me. Keep him as long as you like, and don't stand any nonsense!"

The Earl nodded, and smiled; Treherne shook his fist laughingly; the spirited horse started forward, and in a few minutes they were out of sight, before Gordon had got his foot in the stirrup.

During the drive they discussed Treherne's position in all its bearings, and the Earl promised to do his very best to dissuade the Baronet from instigating a prosecution, even if he became aware of Treherne's identity with Ralph Trevanion.

"It would be the dirtiest trick possible," Lord Wildgrave said with a frown.

"Still, he would play it. You see, he would be so mad at having been duped," was the grave answer.

"But it will never be found out, so don't be afraid; and the man won't last for ever," said the Earl, cheerfully, for he had no liking at all for the individual he had helped to save.

"No; but he may last too long," said Treherne, sadly, for a presentiment of coming evil was strong upon him that evening. "And now, however it turns out, I shall never forget your kindness, Lord Wildgrave."

"My dear fellow, you are putting it all the wrong way," said the Earl, with a kindly smile. "What don't we owe to you?"

They drew up at a side door according to promise when they reached the Castle, and Treherne went at once to change his things.

It was close upon the dinner-hour by the time he was ready; but without waiting for anything he started at once to find Wilfred.

It was rather a long way round to his suite of rooms, and he had to pass several others on the way.

Suddenly a door burst open, and Kitty Gifford stood before him in a blue peignoir, with her hair hanging in dishevelled masses over her shoulders, and her cheeks white as death.

"Oh, what have I done?" she cried, clasping her hands, and wringing them distractedly. "I've ruined you entirely! all through my—my—" and she dropped her head with bitter sobs.

"Hush! someone will hear you!" he said, looking round in dismay. "What is it, Kitty? You wouldn't have done me any harm for the world, I know!"

"I have! I have!" stamping her foot. "Don't talk to me kindly, or you'll drive me mad;"

A sudden thought flashed through his head, but it seemed so wildly impossible—could she have had anything to do with that anonymous warning, "You don't mean—you can't mean?" he began—and stopped, really ashamed to put the question into words.

She looked up at him, and then looked down, in quivering over-powering shame. Had he guessed? Oh, if the floor would only open to hide her from those grave inquiring eyes into which she would never be able to look with the fearless frankness of old.

Oh how paltry and mean her jealousy seemed, how utterly vile and unworthy her suspicions, face to face with the man who would never stoop to one thought of dishonour.

"Don't ask me anything," she said brokenly. "What has happened is this, you gave me your photograph long ago—perhaps you've forgotten," with a deep sigh as she remembered the very hour when it was given, and the look in his eyes which accompanied it, "and I had it in my album here—and it's gone!"

"Is that all?" he exclaimed, very much relieved, for he thought she was going to confess something much more terrible. "I dare say it won't do any harm. Every one would guess that my hair wasn't always white."

"Kitty are you mad?" came from her husband inside the room. "Do you know that you've two minutes to dress in?" He could not see whom she was talking to, but supposed it was Hilda Romer.

She started—looked over her shoulder—then stooped forward and whispered,—

"You don't understand—your own signature, Ralph Trevanion, was underneath it. Oh, I could kill myself when I think of it," she broke out passionately.

"Ah! then, I'm done for," he said very quietly.

She gave him one look of intense horror. Then her husband called her again still more urgently, and she vanished inside her room. The door shut behind her—and Treherne was left alone in the corridor.

A sudden chill fell upon him, and standing there with the radiance of the setting sun falling full upon the beauty of his face, he looked like a martyr ready to die for the cross, and only felt like a convict just sentenced to death!

(To be continued.)

## NURSE BROWN.

—o—

THE dinner was over at Woodcote Farm; the milk was strained into glittering pans on the dairy shelves, and the fowl-house door was locked beyond all chance of danger from chicken-thieves; and, in the soft purple of the gloaming, Mary Grace and her young London visitor had put on their sunbonnets and were climbing the wooded slopes to Furze Hill.

Mary was a typical country maiden, rosy, fair-haired and plump, not to say commonplace.

Alice Deane was taller and more slender, with large dark eyes, a skin that was transparently pale, and a sweet serious mouth.

Her dress was far plainer than that of her companion, but there was a certain style in every fold and plait that was lacking in Mary's.

"Oh," cried the latter, breathlessly, "don't walk so fast, Alice! Do stop a minute and look around you—at your own ancestral acres!"

"My own ancestral acres!" Alice shrugged her shoulders. "It is all rock and woodland, so far as I can see, and the old house is ready to tumble down at the first gust of wind. Oh, dear, there's an end of my plans about taking boarders and making a little money! No boarder with any regard for his personal safety would ever come to Furze Hill."

Side by side the two girls sat down on the doorstep of the old house.

"It would take," said Alice Deane, looking despairingly about her—"it would take a fortune to put this place into anything like decent repair. And where am I to get money I should like to know? I can't even sell the place. Nobody would buy it. I did think I could make a living out of the old house, but now that I have seen it—" "Oh, Mary, I've seen quite enough of my ancestral halls! Let us go home!"

Mary's attempts at consolation were in vain on the way home.

"Oh, don't talk to me!" said Mary. "I'm a pauper—a beggar. Why on earth wasn't I brought up to a trade, instead of being kept at that genteel boarding-school? I wonder what I am good for?"

"Dear Alice, don't fret," said chubby Mary. "Remember you are a lady."

"Much good that does me!" said Mary, scornfully. "I couldn't go begging to my relatives if I would, and I wouldn't if I could. I've some pride left. Oh, Mary, don't you know of somebody who wants something done for them, so I can earn my bread?"

"Something will certainly turn up," said Mary, hopefully. "Oh, there is a light in the

sitting-room! Some one has come in, and mother has lit the big lamp. I wonder who it can be? Oh, it's only Harry Newton."

Harry Newton was a neighbour—a tall, stalwart young farmer with a healthy, sun-burned face and kindly blue eyes.

"It's mother," said he. "She's ill and I am afraid it's diphtheria, and the doctor wants you to write to the nurse you had yourself."

"Oh, Harry!" cried Mary, "what a pity! Is it really diphtheria? But who is to do the house work?"

"Oh, I can manage that myself," said the young man, "if only I could get the nurse."

"I'll write at once," said Mary. "Or, better still, I'll go for her myself. But she comes expensive."

"I don't care for the expense," said the young farmer; "though I know mother will fret about it. But she must have the best of care."

"Is that your Henry Newton?" said Alice Deane, as the tall figure vanished into the twilight. "He's rather good-looking, isn't he?"

But Mary returned from town the next day alone.

"She can't come," said she. "She is engaged in a scarlet fever case."

"Mary," said Alice, speaking suddenly, "let me go!"

"Go where?"

"To the sick woman—in the place of this trained nurse. Cousin Sarah had diphtheria once, and the doctor said I took excellent care of her. I would as soon be called nurse Brown as anything else—and I would so like to be doing something and earning some money!"

Mary looked hesitatingly at her friend.

"It would be awfully hard work," said she. "All the better!" impatiently cried out Alice.

So the heiress of Furze Hill went to the Newton's farmhouse in the capacity of a trained nurse, and gave the very highest satisfaction.

"I'm sure, Miss Brown," said good old Mrs. Newton on the day she first sat up in an arm-chair lined with pillows, "I don't know how we can ever pay you for all you have done!"

"I've worked for wages," said the tall, pale "Fraud," "and you have given them to me. We are quits."

"No, we ain't," said Mrs. Newton. "You've give me my medicine, and all that sort of thing, to be sure, but you've done more than that. You've got up early to look after the house; you've cheered up Harry when he was worried about me, and you've read aloud to me, and sung sweet, old-fashioned hymns, many a time when I couldn't sleep for nervousness, when you needed sleep almost worse than I did!"

"Mother," said Harry, who had come in with a brimming pail of milk, and stood close at the trained nurse's side, "it's all true what you say, every word of it. But you haven't said it all. She's goin' to do more for us, even than she has done. She's goin' to stay here, altogether."

"What!" cried old Mrs. Newton.

"She has promised to be my wife," said Harry, putting one Hercules arm tenderly around the slender waist of the trained nurse. "Eh, mother, what do you say to that?"

"Not if you object," said the girl, her quick eyes reading the changes in Mrs. Newton's face, almost as if they were the letters of the alphabet. "I will enter no family where I am not welcome."

"It ain't that, my dear," said Mrs. Newton, fumbling uneasily with her spectacles. "Welcome! If you was the queen you couldn't be welcomer. But I've always had a notion I'd like Harry to marry another woman."

The tall girl in black drew back from the clasping embrace.

"You never told me," she said, quickly, "that you were engaged."



"I'm not," remonstrated Harry. "Oh, mother, what a scrape you're getting me into. For all that dear little mother of mine looks so plain and homespun, she's a deal of pride in her, and she always planned for me to marry Miss Deane, the lady who inherits Furze Hill. She's a friend of Mary Grace."

"And I'm sure," struck in the old lady, "that she'd like Harry if she were to see him."

"So am I," murmured the trained nurse. "And there ain't no fine lady a bit too good for him," added the eager mother.

"No, indeed, there isn't," said the girl. "You are right, Mrs. Newton—I am willing to give up all my claims in favour of this Miss Deane."

"If I had a dozen other sons, my dear," said Mrs. Newton, "you should have 'em all; but it's hard for an old woman to forget her lifelong plans, and—"

"I am quite willing that he should marry Miss Deane," quietly repeated the nurse.

Harry smote his closed hand on the table with an energy that everything on it jumped.

"It appears to me," said he, "that I'm left quite out of the question in all these arrangements. I want you to understand that I won't be given up! Do you hear? Won't! No, mother—I'd do a deal to please you, but you'll never have the young lady of Furze Hill for your daughter-in-law!"

"Yes, she shall!" cried out the girl falling on her knees beside the old lady, and hiding her face in her lap, while the rosy blushes mounted to the very roots of her hair. "And you will have to marry Miss Deane after all, Harry, for I am Alice Deane! Oh please to forgive me, for I have been deceiving you all along!"

And she told them the whole story, half-laughing, half-crying.

"I'm heiress to nothing at all," said she, "but a few barren acres and a tumble-down house. But, such as it is, if Harry will have me—"

"It don't make a pin's worth of difference to me," said the sturdy young farmer. "It's you I love, and you I mean to have, whether you call yourself Alice Deane or Nurse Brown."

And old Mrs. Newton declared that she never was so happy in all her life!

## THE SECRET WHICH PARTED THEM

—C—

### CHAPTER IV.

A SIGN of regret broke from the lips of Lady Constance Vivian.

There was no further danger of the secret of her two friends being betrayed.

Whatever trouble might be in store for her she was determined to shield them, if it lay in her power.

Colonel Vivian was on intimate terms with Sir John Eustace, and she would in no wise risk getting Stella into disgrace.

That sigh aroused the soldier's wrath. In it he read her satisfaction at having baffled him.

His fine eyes blazed as he looked at her.

"Lady Constance," he said, with firmness, "you think you have succeeded in evading my just inquiries; but you deceive yourself. I am not so easily beaten, as you will yet learn; and if you think you have elevated yourself in my opinion by your conduct, you are wrong! I never have thought so badly of you as I do now. Had you been repentant—had you shown any real regret for the agony of my soul, then I might have felt for your sorrow, for if you really care for that fellow I suppose you suffer also. As it is, you have removed yourself outside the pale of even my sympathy."

Saying which, Colonel Vivian flung himself

into the corner once more, but as suddenly sprang up, and, looking out of the window, surveyed the country with a searching gaze, after which he again took his place with a strange smile which his wife could not fathom.

She stood still.

She was angry with her husband, and deeply wounded by him; but she loved him with a tender and loyal love, and, regardless of her pride, her heart was yearning for him to take her to his breast with his old affection.

But Colonel Vivian had once more enounced himself behind his newspaper, and was rapidly making notes in a book for memoranda which he had taken from his pocket.

Lady Constance regarded him wonderingly. The change in him was so sudden and unexpected that she felt like one baffled by a powerful breeze—panting and out of breath.

One thing was self-evident—that Colonel Vivian had no more to say to her; and, after some hesitation, she accepted the situation, and taking her seat she gazed dreamily out of the window, her usually busy thoughts benumbed and chaotic.

At the first station at which they stopped a gentleman entered the carriage, and possessed himself of the second corner, upon the same side as Colonel Vivian, from whence he had a good view of the great beauty of Lady Constance.

How greatly he admired her no one looking on could for one moment have doubted.

But the Colonel was too much absorbed in his fancied wrongs, and his wife in her real trouble to notice him. And he had not the most remote idea that they were even travelling together, for not a word or a sign passed between them.

There was one break in the journey; but Colonel Vivian seemed to have forgotten his wife, and got out without her. In fact, he was unaware how long they were to wait at the station.

When the two gentlemen were gone she learnt for herself that there was a quarter of an hour allowed for refreshments, and she also descended, but in doing so caught her foot upon the step, and twisted her ankle.

At this juncture her travelling companion rushed to her assistance, and saved her from an awkward fall.

"Shall I help you to the waiting room?" he inquired, his face full of interest; "or would you prefer going back to the carriage? I shall be very happy to bring you anything there which you may require."

Lady Constance was a gracious woman, and the gentlemanly kindness which the stranger showed her in no wise annoyed her, because it was rendered with courtesy and respect.

She elected to return to her carriage, for her foot was paining her very greatly. But much as she needed it, she declined accepting his offer, because she did not like to have monetary transactions with a man of whom she knew nothing.

Colonel Vivian, finding that the stoppage was a long one, was returning to take his wife some refreshment, when he stopped suddenly, for their fellow traveller was standing with his foot upon the step, looking up at his wife with true homage shining from his eyes, and talking to her.

Maddened with jealousy, the husband turned abruptly back, and stood watching from a distance.

The stranger was a singularly handsome man, darker even than the Douglasses of Norrington Castle, and to the soldier's exalted mind he strongly resembled Viscount Venwood.

The Colonel began to doubt his own reason, and passed his hand feverishly over his brow.

The young man raised his hat to Lady Constance with more than English politeness, and passed into the refreshment room, returning with a bottle of champagne.

"I see you are suffering greatly," he said, with utmost kindness; "this really will help you bear the pain, if you will do me the honour to accept my advice."

She hesitated.

Her own pain and his eager face decided the question.

"You are very good," she said; "I cannot say no to you;" and she took the wine eagerly, for she was feeling faint and ill.

The train began to move, the guard's flag was waved, his whistle sounded. Lady Constance looked eagerly from the window, afraid that her husband would be left behind, and saw that it was by no accident, but with intention that he was so left.

He had his portmanteau deposited upon the platform, and he was standing beside it.

As the train passed him, he met his wife's eyes, and raised his hat to her with that strange smile which she had seen before that day.

The heart of Lady Constance Vivian stood still.

A deadly fear took possession of her; she felt that if he was going out of her life it would be not worth the living.

Going? He was gone.

The train took a sharp curve, and Lady Constance had seen the last of her husband for years, perhaps for ever!

It came to her dimly that such was the case, and filled her with a sorrow too deep for her to gauge.

The stranger watched the quivering lips with deepest pity and sympathy, thinking that it was the pain of her ankle which caused it, not dreaming that she and the gentleman whom they had left behind were aught to one another.

He was wonderfully kind to Lady Constance during that journey, and she was grateful to him, and drawn to him too by a subtle softness in his manner, unusual to men in general.

She could have fancied, too, that he and she had met before; but it was evident that he had no remembrance of the fact, so she said nothing of the thought which came to her.

When at length London was reached he was about to offer to procure a hansom for her, when he became aware that a cockaded footman was standing at the door, touching his hat respectfully, and that his lady companion recognized him.

Still there was one thing more he could do for her.

He offered her his arm, and helped her over to the handsome carriage which was waiting for her orders.

Then he raised his hat once more, and she was whirled away by the fast trotting horses. He stood watching the brougham until it was out of sight.

Her sweet smile rested in his memory, and her courteous thanks, but he had failed to learn her destination.

Her order had been given in one simple word, which meant so much and yet told him so little.

"Home."

That Lady Constance was a married woman he never even dreamed, her youth and beauty disarming him of any suspicion of her being a matron.

He inquired of several porters and cabmen as to whose carriage it was which had just driven off, but none of them could give him any information upon the subject; so, with a sigh of disappointment he hailed a hansom, and returned to the luggage van to claim his portmanteau. As he went along the line of carriages he remembered he had left his umbrella in the netting, and going back or it, he saw a dainty cambric handkerchief upon the ground, which he eagerly picked up, and searched in the corner for the name.

It was only marked Constance, so it told him but little. Still he felt a sense of satisfaction at having obtained that small item of information.

He had at least a name by which to think

of the beautiful girl to whom he had taken such a strong fancy.

He drove to the Langham Hotel, and made up his mind to enjoy himself before he entered upon the chief object which had brought him to England. He did not himself know to the full what he had come for.

All he did know of himself and his family history can be explained in a very few words. Leoni Angelo had never remembered a father, and had been born in Italy.

His mother lived in great seclusion. She was a sweet looking woman of good family, but very small means, and very proud and sensitive, as many well born Romans are.

She was almost the last of her race, her only living relation being the haughty and arrogant Count Angelo, who was not upon good terms with her, for reasons which will be heard hereafter.

She was an essentially clever woman, deeply read and versed even in abstruse subjects, and good at both the living and dead languages.

Signora Angelo, as she was always called, needed no help to give her son an altogether satisfactory education, and, moreover, taught him things innumerable, which a paid teacher would not have troubled about.

She had ennobled his nature with all things beautiful from his early childhood.

She had kept the evil from him and shown him the good in the brightest colours—she and he being the most true friends and inseparable companions.

As he grew older he often asked her about his father, but it was evident that she shrank from the subject.

She grew very sad. Tears dimmed the dreamy, dark, almond-shaped eyes, and the proud lips trembled, but no word of blame or censure fell from them.

"I loved him with all my heart," she whispered, as she kissed his boy; "but he died before you were born Leo, and it is all too sad to speak of."

Then the childish arms would twine about her neck, the boy's cheek was laid to hers, and she was comforted.

That was as far as Leoni Angelo ever got in the history of his father, and then it seemed enough for him, for his mother filled his heart.

But when cruel death came between them, then he knew that it had not been sufficient.

He was a man when Signora Angelo was stricken with her fatal illness, and with the exception of glimpses of consciousness, breaks of light in the black sky, she was insensible from first to last.

In one of those breaks he saw that she was troubled, that something was in her mind.

"Mother," he murmured, "have you anything to say which I ought to know? Oh! my dear, remember that if you leave me I shall be alone in the world. Have I no relations?"

"I have only one," she gasped.

"And had my father none?"

He watched her face intently.

A terrible struggle was going on within her.

"They were no friends of mine, Leo," she replied, faintly. "They were hard and cold, and insulting, and I vowed that you should never be exposed to the frost-biting pride and injustice which blighted my life, so I have kept you from them. Perhaps I have erred. I know not, but I think I have at any rate insured you a happy youth. You have been content with me, my darling, have you not?"

"More than content," he returned warmly; "happy, truly happy, mother mine. If only I could keep you I would ask for no more."

A gleam of joy passed over the beautiful face.

"Thank Heaven for that, but when I am gone—"

The voice broke, the brightness died away.

"Oh! Leo, you will be alone, quite alone." He buried his face in her bed clothes that she might not see the expression of desolation which fell upon it; but she seemed to know.

He felt her tremble.

"Leo," she whispered, "I had one real

friend once, I loved her and she loved me; give me paper and pencil, I will send you to her."

He eagerly obeyed her, but thought the few disjointed lines would never be written, and the sweet spirit fled as the name was written upon the envelope; but no address was there to guide him where to seek his mother's one friend.

He thought little of it at the time, all his love, his sorrow, the bitterness of his soul, was fixed upon the still figure who could no longer respond to the passionate love of his southern nature.

One thing had been strange in his mother. Italian though she was to the backbone, she always conversed with her son in English, and spoke to him as though the white cliffs of Albion must be counted as his home.

For this reason, and this reason alone, Leoni Angelo fancied that his father must have been an Englishman, and decided to go to London to look for his mother's friend.

An insight into the affairs of Signora Angelo proved that the exquisite little cottage and garden were her freehold property, and that small as her income had been she had managed to save something for her son, who was twenty-three years of age at the time of her death, and had been brought up with no knowledge of the world, and no profession.

For some time after his loss the young man's energies seemed to lie dormant.

He could only visit his mother's grave, and the well remembered haunts where he and she had been together; but youth is too elastic to always mourn.

The day came when the desire to rove awoke within him as a thing of life, and from that moment his one wish was to move on and see the world, and try, if he could, to find his mother's friend, and through her he thought it possible that he might yet learn the history of her early life, which she had withheld from him.

## CHAPTER V.

WHEN Lady Constance reached her home she sent for two people—Stella Eustace and her doctor.

The latter came first, and the ankle was bound up, and her ladyship left upon the sofa, with strict injunctions not to attempt to walk even across the room, by the fashionable medico who attended her.

He need not, however, have impressed it upon her so urgently, for the pain was so intense that Lady Constance really had no desire to move.

As the doctor went out he met Miss Eustace coming in, and reported the accident to her, knowing her to be his patient's great friend.

Stella entered the room with a sympathetic face.

"Constance, dear, this is bad news," she said, kissing her affectionately. "But I am glad you arrived to-day, or I should not have seen you. My old dad has taken a sudden freak to start for no given destination in the yacht from Ryde to-morrow. I cannot quite make it out. I hope he has no inkling that Stirling and I hear from one another sometimes. But what a grey thing life would be without these little glimpses of sunshine, which we enjoy, thanks to our dear, good, kind Constance. It is indeed pleasant to have a real friend, and I shall never cease to be grateful to you while memory lasts—nor will my dear boy. But Con, dear, how ill you look! Is it your poor foot? What a wretch I am to be thinking of myself when you are suffering!"

And she took one of the beautifully-moulded white hands and held it between her own.

Lady Constance smiled at her, sadly enough; but still she smiled.

"Don't encourage me to think of it, dear girl. People can forget pain in a more or less degree."

"I always find it is the less," laughed Stella. "I am a bad hand at bearing it."

"Well, I mean to try and let it be more. I want to be patient. There is so much to bear in this world that a few more aches cannot really signify."

Stella looked at her keenly.

"Constance, something is the matter," she said, nervously. "I wish I was not going away—I do, indeed!"

"Stirling is not ill, is he? I thought, perhaps, he would have written—that I might have seen a letter peeping out of your pocket, impatient to come to me."

"Poor little Star! No, dear; your lover is not ill, although his spirits are at very low ebb that he cannot see his darling; and he charged me with so very many loving messages to his dear girl. I was to tell you so many sweet and pretty things, dear, that, not being a lover, I scarcely know how to frame them into his impassioned words, and fancy you can picture them for yourself. I know I was particularly to say that no man could, in the past, present or future, love a girl as Stirling loves you."

"You will not agree to that, Con, will you? You have always maintained that your husband was the warmest and most faithful lover under the sun."

"I dare say I did, Star; but the sun cannot be always at its meridian," she returned, with a melancholy smile. "But I do not want to talk about myself. I have a confession to make, and I fear you will be both vexed and disappointed. Stella, dear, your lover did write, and I had charge of his letter; but—but I lost it! Don't be angry with me, old friend. I could not help it, believe me."

Miss Eustace flushed hotly.

She did her best to command her features; but she could not.

"Oh! Constance, if any one should find it, what trouble there would be," she said, almost reproachfully.

"Make yourself happy on that score dear girl, there is more than a hundred miles between us and that letter, and it is directed to me—not you. Moreover, it is at the bottom of a brook."

"Good gracious, Con! how did you manage that?"

Lady Constance looked very sad.

"You must not question me too closely," she answered loyally, for she would not betray her husband's injustice. "I dropped my bag into the stream, and the letter was inside it."

"And you couldn't get it out again?"

"No, I am very sorry for your disappointment, dear, and I want you to do me a favour."

"That I will, you have done me many."

"Well, sit down at my writing table, and send a few affectionate lines to your lover; but Stella, dear, do not tell him of the loss of your letter. I know how it would worry him, and I want as little said on the subject as possible. You can say you are glad he wrote, without untruth. I will send off your letter at once, dear, in case I may not be able to do so later. What do you say to posting it yourself? then you will know that it is quite safe. I cannot tell how long my ankle may be bad, and it does not do to trust particular letters to strange hands."

Stella sat gazing at her friend, then leant forward and touched her.

"Con, what has happened to you? You are as sweet as ever, but your music is in the minor key; you are so changed that you might be somebody else, and it grieves me, for trouble only could make you like this."

She hesitated, then lifting her truthful eyes to those of her friend she said,—

"Yes, I have had trouble, Star, but it is not of a nature which I could tell to you, or any one, so do not ask me about it again, there's a dear."

Stella pressed her hand.

She had perfect confidence in her friend, and felt whoever else might be to blame, it was not Lady Constance Vivian; and she rose and went to the writing table as she suggested.



"Now, Star, you are not going to have it all your own way," she said. "Give me one of the inkstands here, and all which is needful, for I must write to the Countess to announce my safe arrival at home, and you can be my postman with that, too."

"Hardly that! for the postman brings your letters, he does not carry them away."

"Yes he does, in the mail bags; don't try to be sharp, Star, else I shall think you are cross with me for losing your letter."

"Don't think that, then, Con; but for you I should have no letters at all. Do you think papa will ever come round about Stirling?"

"Has he ever told you his reason for saying so to him?" inquired Lady Constance, guardedly; for although Stella was her greatest friend she was too staunch to betray Sir John's secrets to her.

"No, he won't tell me. It is evidently some great dislike to Lord Douglas. His face softens when I speak of the Countess, and I am sure he does not dislike Stirling; but the Earl is as an iron door looked and bolted. There is no passing the barrier, and my darling is on the other side of it. Is there nothing to be done to make them better friends?"

"Not at present, I fear. Patience, my dear Star; you are very young yet, you know; everything comes to those who wait. You have heard, have you not, that the Maypole was married to the scare-crow in time?"

"Yes," laughed Stella, as she gave her friend the last requisite for her letter writing; "but I remember that it was a tedious courtship, and I do not want a tedious courtship, my dear, but a bright and happy life with the man I love, as you have."

"I shall tell Stirling that you two are the pattern couple whom I wish to copy."

Lady Constance Vivian dug her pen suddenly into the inkstand, and nearly upset it, Stella watching her the while.

"Is the Colonel at home?" she asked.

"No."

"When is he coming? I should like to say good-bye to him. He is such a favourite of mine! Will you ask him to run round in the evening?"

Lady Constance pushed the soft curls from her forehead, as though they oppressed her.

"My dear, how can I write? I do not know Clement's movements at all. I do not fancy he will be home to-night," she ended, bending over the paper so that her friend could not see her face.

Stella was at her side again in a moment.

"You can't put me off like that, Con," she said. "Something is wrong between you and the Colonel. Poor old girl! I verily believe it is your first quarrel. But make it up, quickly, dear, and you will be happier than ever. There is much truth in the saying, 'Amantium ira amoris integratio est.'"

She saw that it was kinder to say no more to her friend, and began a letter to her lover accordingly; nor did she name to him the miscarriage of his epistle.

She remained as long as she could with Lady Constance, whose brougham eventually took her home, stopping at the post office on the way, when Stella posted the two envelopes, both in the handwriting of her friend.

That evening the girl was restless, and her father, seeing it, questioned her.

"Well, yes, you dear old sharp eyes!" she laughed. "I am worried—worried about Constance's ankle."

"Nothing else?" he queried, kindly.

"Now you are too sharp," she continued. "Yet why should I hide my fears from you? Colonel Vivian and his wife have quarrelled, there is no doubt of it."

"Nonsense, my dear, I know of no couple less likely to do such a thing."

"I am sure of it."

"Did Lady Constance tell you so?"

"The question is superfluous, dad. You know that she would not do so. But she looks utterly miserable, and he has not

returned home with her. I am sorry that we are going away just now—very."

"Trust Vivian! He is too fond of his wife to remain away long. She will be able to do without your company, small woman."

And early the following morning Sir John Eastace, his daughter, and such servants as they deemed they would require on board, started for Hyde, and before the sun set that night the yacht was skimming the ocean like a great seagull, with her white sails set for a wandering tour upon the land of waters.

Stella was standing in her pretty dark blue cloth suit braided in gold, and her sailor hat bearing the title of "The Mermaid" upon its ribbon, looking back with wistful eyes towards the land, which was lessening in the distance, with a heart filled with pain at the thought of leaving her lover so far behind, and the link between them, her friend, Lady Constance.

Very beautiful looked the fair girl as the breeze played among her rippling golden locks, the tender violet eyes gazed before her, and there was a faint quiver about the small well-shaped mouth—the perfect girlish figure in full relief against the cloudless sky.

So thought Sir John as he came towards her unheeded, wearing his India-rubber shoes.

"A penny for your thoughts, my lass," he laughed, as he flung his arm around her. "Is my little girl in a transcendental mood? Why, Stella, dear, what is wrong with you?" as he noticed that the violets were bathed in evening dew.

"Must I tell the truth?"

"Surely you are not afraid of your father, are you, my child?"

"I was only thinking of Viscount Venwood, papa," she replied, simply, "and wondering when he and I shall meet again; for, oh! dad, don't be angry, I love him so, he is the light of my life."

"I am not angry, dear," he answered in a voice which was soft and low, with an unwonted tremble in it; "I too loved like that once, I am not too old to remember."

"Too old at forty-five! I should think not, indeed. How I wish I could remember my mother. She must have been very sweet for you to have loved her so."

He shrank back at her words.

A strange expression crossed his manly features.

Then he said steadily,

"Yes, darling, she was a very sweet woman."

"And beautiful?"

"Look in the glass, mignonette; you are her image!"

"And she loved you very, very much?"

"Very, very much," he repeated almost sadly.

"She was too gentle and good for this world, so the angels took her to one fairer, and better, and purer."

"Oh, father! how you must have loved her?" murmured Stella.

The answer of Sir John Eastace was a sigh, and the father and daughter stood in silence, still looking out to sea, with his arm thrown protectingly about her.

## CHAPTER VI.

Up to the time her friend Miss Eastace had left, Lady Constance very fairly kept up her spirits; but when alone bitter tears trickled down her pale cheeks, pale with pain and sorrow.

She loved her husband passionately, and she thought that he could doubt her faith to him filled her with grief and wounded pride, and there lurked in her heart an undefined dread of evil to come, which she could not fully understand.

"Oh! Clement, Clement," she mourned, covering her face with her hands, "what have I ever done that you should doubt me? what have I said that you should leave me?"

But there was no reply, save the ticking of the exquisite clock of ormolu and marble upon the mantelpiece.

She could scarcely bear to hear it, her pulses tried to keep in unison with it, and she grew nervous, and over-wrought.

Her dinner was brought there to her, but faint though she was, she could scarcely eat any of it.

The doctor came again, and recommended bed, not only so, but finding that there was a proper carrying chair in the house, he saw her Ladyship safely to her own room, and waited to see to her ankle again when she had been helped to her downy couch, after which he left her with kindly wishes for a peaceful and refreshing night, and orders not to get up the following morning.

But alas! there was no rest for that tortured heart.

Lady Constance was utterly wretched; still she could not see that it would have been possible for her to have acted otherwise than she had done.

Betray Stella's secret she would not and could not, of that she was fully determined.

Perhaps her husband's unjust anger would soon die out, and he would see his folly.

Perhaps he would return and ask her to forgive him.

If only he would do so how quickly she would give him back the heart which was still all his own.

She stretched out her arms to him in the darkness, but there was no one to clasp within them, and they fell feebly upon the bed-clothes.

"Clement, my one love," she murmured, but no Clement answered her, for Colonel Vivian was having a scarcely less unpleasant time of it than his wife.

He too was tossing restlessly from side to side, upon a gridiron-like bed in a small inn at the nearest village to that brook where lay Stella's secret; into which Lady Constance had flung her hand-bag, and thus thought to end the dispute between herself and her husband.

She never dreamed that by her own rash but innocent act she had parted herself from the man she loved.

When Colonel Vivian saw the bag fall into the stream he made up his mind to recover it, whatever trouble it might cost him, unless his wife would confess the truth to him and seek his pardon.

He meant to give her the option that night upon their return home.

Yes, he intended then to take her safely back to the shelter of his own roof. But his anger against her was so deepened at the station by her making acquaintance with the handsome young fellow who had travelled with them, so soon as his back was turned, that his heart hardened against her.

It is only just to state that he was quite unaware of her accident, or that she had been unavoidably thrown upon the stranger's protecting kindness.

The sight of it so maddened him against her that he was scarcely the master of himself or his actions, but was driven on by that fierce tornado of jealousy within, that, once let loose, rushes upon its terrible course—rending, uprooting, desolating, and can be stayed by no human hand, till all which made life worth the living was destroyed and ruined.

Chivalrous, courteous Colonel Vivian, with that wild storm raging within him, was dis-courteous, unmanly, cruel. He left his wife to go home alone—left her in company with one of the very men of whom he was jealous—left her without a word of explanation, or opportunity to make her peace with him, to go and find evidence against her, which if found would prove her moral ruin.

He never doubted what he should find. It was an incriminating love letter from his rival Viscount Venwood!

And yet a week before he would have felled any man to the ground who had dared to suggest to him the possibility of any rival, in the loving heart of his loyal wife.

When the train moved out of the station he felt no sorrow, no pity. He watched it till it passed from sight, then turned away with a



[COLONEL VIVIAN MADE SHORT WORK OF FISHING THE BAG OUT OF THE CLEAR WATER!]

fixed determination in his heart—a steady purpose in his mind.

He inquired when the next down train was due, and finding that he had two hours to wait he went to the hotel and ordered a cutlet to be prepared for him; but he turned from it in disgust, he had no power to eat, although he drank feverishly—even deeply, sober man though he usually was.

It seemed an eternity to him until those two hours had passed away.

The train came at length, and again the comparatively short journey seemed everlasting.

He thought there must be some mistake. He fancied it must have passed that station.

But no, it had not done so; it stopped, and he got out, and looking his portmanteau, he started off on foot, inquiring his way to the brook where lay the secret which had parted him from his wife.

It had seemed no distance, but by the road it was three miles.

He was a good walker, he did not mind the three miles in the least. The exercise was a relief to his excited and pent-up feelings. His pace was swift—even fierce.

He was in haste to prove the wife of his love guilty, so strange a thing is the human heart!

He had not a hope that it could be otherwise, and he wanted it all to be proved, settled and ended.

He reached the stream quickly, his long strides had made the miles into short ones.

Following the brook, he came at last to the rustic bridge.

A feeling of absolute triumph came over him.

He had run his wife's secret to earth!

She had thought to hide her fault from him.

She had sought to evade and baffle him, and he was even then standing, looking through the translucent water at the crocodile skin bag below, not half a yard under the surface,

lying within reach of his extended arm, and the hook of his umbrella.

He made short work of fishing it out, and having done so he sat upon the bank and opened it.

Yes! there it was, the letter about which his wife had defied him.

Now that it was in his power, he shrank from breaking the seal.

A yearning for his wife and her love came over him.

He would have been inexpressibly thankful to find that envelope addressed to any one else.

He drew it from the bag with trembling fingers.

Great Heaven! there were the condemnatory words written in a bold, strong, masculine hand, which he recognized at once as being that of Viscount Venwood.

*Lady Constance Vivian.*

His spirit sank within him, it seemed to be evaporating from his extremities.

His passion appeared to have come to a sudden end.

The tornado had passed over all the fair land of his happiness, and ere it turned, he had time to look at the fearful wreck which it had left behind it.

Then he made up his mind to open the letter.

Had he not gone back on purpose to do that?

Slowly he broke the seal bearing the coat-of-arms of the Douglas family; still it was done, and the letter was in his shaking hand.

As his eyes fell upon the passionate words of love with which that letter was filled, sparks of living fire seemed to be struck out from the keen, grey orbs.

A deathly pallor overspread his face, gleaming out with a livid hue through the bronze left there by hotter suns than ours.

To the very end he read that letter, not one word was left.

He sat with it in his hand, motionless. A keen agony filled his soul, crushed it for the time being.

How long he remained there staring at those written words he never knew; they felt to be stamped upon his brain in letters of fire.

One phrase was especially distasteful to him.

"My dear, beautiful love, my whole heart is yours, my whole soul yearns to you. I live only in your precious affection, and pray as I have never prayed before, that the obstacle which keeps us apart may soon be removed, and that I may make my darling my own much worshipped wife. Oh! sweet one, how I long and pine for that time to come, and until it does I shall know no real peace or joy. There is nothing I would not do to set you free from the dictation of those who stand between us. My darling, I know how good you are, and how you cling to your duty; but dear love, I must have you in my life, it is bleak and barren without you; and you must come to me ere long, regardless of every barrier which may be set up between us. You cannot say no, dear one, for all your love is mine, and all my love is yours. Darling, I cannot live without you."

He was the obstacle which kept these two ardent lovers apart!

The thought that it had come to that was almost too much for him.

The sky had been cloudless when he sat down beside the brook, but it grew dark and lowering.

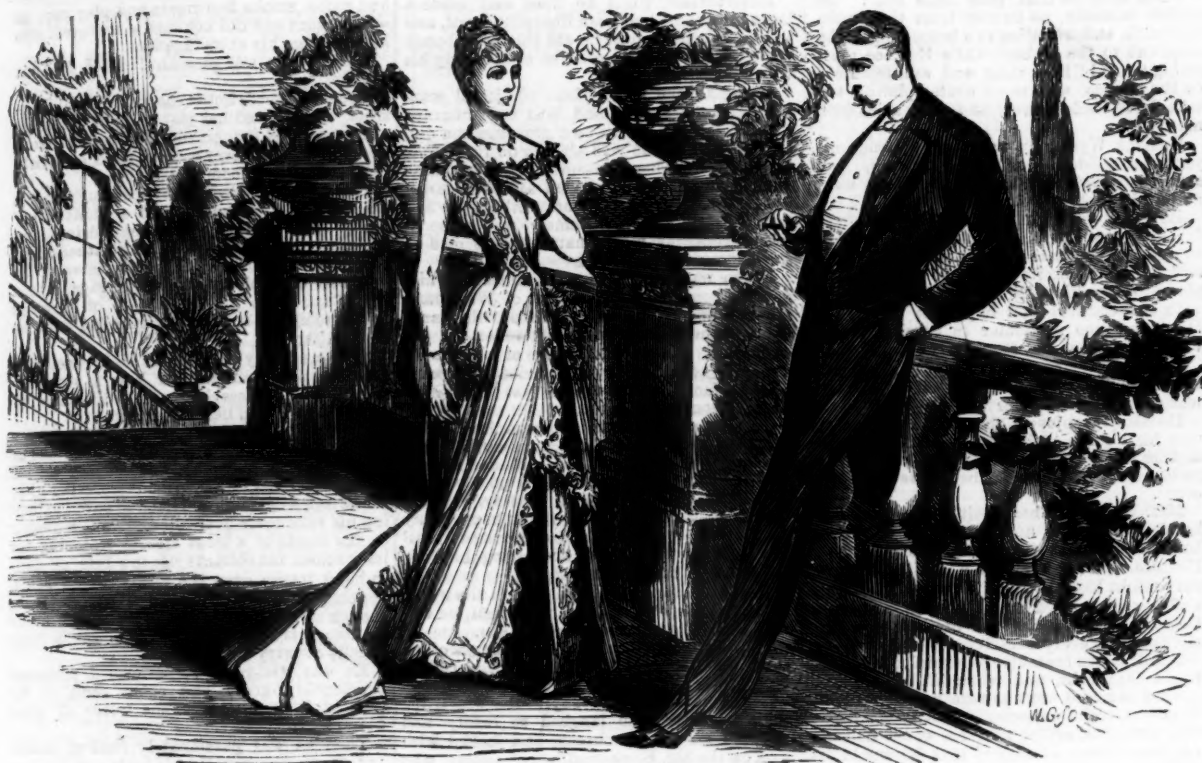
Great rain drops fell, but he gave no heed to them.

Heaven's artillery pealed forth, but he never stirred.

Over and over again he read the Viscount's passionate love words to his wife, and the tornado of his wrath swept back over the once clear surface of his mind.

(To be continued.)





["IS IT TRUE THAT YOU ARE GOING TO ASK SOMEONE TO MARRY YOU?" SAID LOUVA, WITH A WHITE, ANGRY FACE.]

NOVELLETTE.]

## AFTER MANY DAYS.

—:O:—

### CHAPTER I.

"I am thy son," he said,  
'And thou, my mother.'"

"Is it really necessary that she should come here, mother?" asked Eustace Wycherley, as he cut the bread on his plate into strips, and broke the top off his egg with a decided air of ill-humour and annoyance.

"Necessary? Of course it is," replied Mrs. Wycherley, with decision. "I am surprised at your saying such a thing."

"So am I," remarked his cousin, Walter Wilson, looking at him with something very like contempt in his clear blue eyes. "Poor little child! Where else could she go?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," grumbled Wycherley, "only I wish to goodness she wouldn't come here."

"Why?" asked Walter, stirring the spoon round in his cup with a certain amount of vigour that showed he, too, was put out, though from a widely different cause.

"Oh, because she'll be such a nuisance here."

"I don't see that."

"Neither do I," remarked his mother.

"A school-girl, with a heap of books, and masters and mistress's bothering about at all hours of the day."

"I believe Louva's education is pretty well finished."

"Oh, indeed! Glad to hear it."

"Her father was a most particular man. Too well-read and well-educated to neglect his child's education, while her mother, like Russian ladies of rank, was very accomplished, spoke several languages, and sang divinely."

"Then if her daughter takes after her she'll be screeching, 'do, ré, mi,' and thumping on the piano all day long."

"Certainly she will not," replied Mrs. Wycherley, quickly. "I of course should not allow that. She will practice at the proper time, and at proper intervals, not indiscriminately."

"Sure, I hope you will keep her in order. Anyway she'll be a nuisance. Daresay she's fast, like most of the girls of the rising generation, and will want to play billiards with us, or at any rate mark while we are playing, and bore us in the smoking-room, follow us out to the stables, want to ride our hunters, and generally get herself in the way and be disliked."

"You seem to have a queer notion of a young lady's behaviour, Eustace."

"Not of a young lady's. I have of these female hobbledoys of fifteen or thereabouts, who don't know how to behave, and are worse than twenty boys of the same age."

"I don't know that. You were troublesome enough, Heaven knows, when you were at the hobbledoys stage."

"Besides," struck in Walter, "there will be no necessity for her to want to ride our hunters, as I shall get her a pony for herself, or a horse if she likes it better."

"Really?" sneered his cousin. "Then you mean to constitute yourself guardian and banker to this charming child?"

"Wat needn't do that," remarked his mother. "I shall stand in the place of guardian to Louva, and her fortune is so ample that anything she wants she can purchase herself."

"Still I should like to give her something soon after her arrival here," said the young master of Westcourt. "She may feel strange and lonely knowing none of us, and it will look as though she was welcome, and we wanted to make much of her."

"You are always kind, Wat," smiled his

aunt. "This fresh inmate of your house will, no doubt, appreciate your good nature."

"No doubt she will," laughed Eustace, "get the blind side of our soft cousin, and make him let her turn the whole place topsyturvy."

"And what if she does?" queried Mrs. Wycherley, sharply.

"Why, it will be a confounded nuisance," returned her son. "We didn't want any more petticoats here at present. You are all very well, mother, know our ways, and add to our comfort; but a girl, oh!" and he groaned and turned his handsome eyes Heavenward in an affected style.

"Thank you," said his mother, tartly. "You don't object to me because I do add to your comfort; if I didn't I wonder how soon you would give me my congé!"

"Why, mother!" he began, but she stopped him peremptorily.

"And I think it would be as well for you to remember that this house is not yours, but your cousin's, and that he is at liberty to ask who he chooses here, and fill the place with people, nice or nasty, just as it suits his fancy. Moreover, Louva Westrupp comes here through me, and Wat has kindly fallen in with my views respecting the matter in his usual kindly, good-natured style, and not to please himself as you seem to think."

"You know, aunt, I am sure, that I am very glad to be able to give the little orphan a home. This is such a big place, one or two more people in it can make no manner of difference. Besides, she is related to me of course must be as you say she is to you."

"A connexion of yours, my dear, only. You must remember she is my late husband's cousin, not mine."

"Still, I shall call her cousin," declared the young man, stoutly.

"You must do as you like about that, Wat. She will feel more at home if you are kind to her."

"I mean to be that, poor little soul!" he smiled, tenderly, as he rose from the breakfast-table, and whistling to a brace of spaniels, went out to the stables, while Eustace muttering "fool!" lit a cigar and stammered out on the terrace, and stood contemplating the bare fields, leafless trees, and grey skies with moody eyes.

Eustace Wycherley was a very handsome young man—tall, dark, well formed, well set up, with splendid black eyes, black hair, and an olive skin.

He had charming manners, and was a great favourite in society. At home he was not quite so much appreciated, for he was intensely selfish, and his desire always to make things pleasant for himself frequently interfered with the comfort and happiness of others. He was not too particular in sparing others when his own wishes stood in the way.

He liked ease, comfort, plenty, and was not in the habit of troubling himself to enquire who provided the comforts.

He simply enjoyed them, and having no very high sense of honour he had urged his mother to accept her nephew's invitation when he came of age, and make her home at Westcourt.

Mrs. Wycherley had hesitated, she had two hundred a year for life left her by her husband, which was to revert on her death to Eustace, and he was left a similar sum, so they might have lived with frugal comfort in a villa on the outskirts of London, and have been free to follow the bent of their own inclinations on every occasion.

But Eustace grumbled vigorously, managed to get into debt, and when Walter reached twenty-one, and went to take up his abode at Westcourt, and pressed his aunt to come and live with him, saying that he would find the big place dreary alone, and that he would be glad of Eustace's companionship, he urged his mother in no measured terms to accept the liberal offer which meant so much comfort and luxury for them.

Wat Wilson's father left two thousand a year when he died of grief soon after his wife's early decease, and leaving as trustees two clever business men who managed the estate splendidly.

Eighteen years later when his son came of age his income had increased by five hundred per annum, so Eustace knew he and his mother would have a grand time at Westcourt and that he would share all the good things Walter possessed.

He knew his cousin's genial, kindly nature too well not to be aware that his horses, carriages, servants, guns, preserves, troutstreams, all that he owned, would be cheerfully put at their disposal if they chose to make use of them, and that to a certain extent he would be as good as master of Westcourt.

He was not wrong in his shrewd surmise. For two years he and his mother had enjoyed all the comfort and luxury of Walter's home. He had a couple of hunters, which had been given to him absolutely, and could ride any other horse in the stables except the two Wilson kept for his own special use.

He possessed a brace of splendidly-broken spaniels, three or four of the newest guns, used the dog cart and phaeton whenever he wanted them, and if the truth must be told, far more often than their legitimate owner, invited his friends there as if it were in truth his own place, was lavishly hospitable, which was not to be wondered at, seeing that he had his hand in another's pocket, had his own suite of rooms, a man, whose business it was chiefly to attend upon him, and whom he took away with him when he went on visits or abroad, notwithstanding that it was Walter who paid his wages, and enjoyed to the full his cousin's ample income.

Walter was quite willing that he should do so. His youth had been spent in Mr. Wycherley's house, a clever barrister, who made a large fortune and spent it right royally, and when he died left his wife and son only a pittance of four hundred a year.

Nevertheless, while he lived and made a large income he had been liberality itself, and treated Walter just as he did Eustace, though the boy was really no relative of his, only his wife's nephew.

He had been a large-hearted, jovial man, beloved by everyone, and Wat had mourned him far more than his own graceless son did, and as soon as he was able to do it he took his aunt and her son into his house and shared all he had with them after the large-hearted fashion of his uncle, whom he had loved and admired extremely, and some of whose generous warm nature he seemed to have become possessed of.

There was nothing narrow-minded or niggardly about the young master of Westcourt, nothing ungenerous or underhand, his frank, open, honest face was an index to his character. He was incapable of a mean or sneaking action, and was a striking contrast to his more well-favoured yet less good-natured cousin.

He was a very pleasant companion to live with. He was always cheery, kind, hopeful, always found an excuse for a sinner, always held out a helping hand to a poor wretch struggling in the mire of poverty, sin and despair, never frowned on the unhappy, only smiled and comforted and encouraged until the man grew gay, the despairing hopeful, the unhappy less melancholy.

His aunt adored him, and though she would not have admitted it even to herself, he was really more to her than her own son.

He had come from India in charge of an ayah when only three years old, a ruddy-faced, blue-eyed little orphan, who took to her at once, and eyed shyly the great, big bluff barrister who laughed so loudly and pinched his plump cheeks, and looked with awe on the big, black-eyed boy of twelve, who regarded him with open contempt and called him "Baby" on every occasion, though the little fellow was brave enough, and only childish in a pretty, taking way.

Mrs. Wycherley devoted herself to her dead sister's child, and brought him up with tender care and affection—an affection which he returned with interest later on.

Her own son not showing the most amiable traits it was a consolation for her to turn to this other child which had been given into her charge, and whose sweet, truthful nature presented such a pleasant change to Eustace's.

When, after her husband's death, he returned from abroad, where he had been travelling with a tutor, and took up his abode at Westcourt and begged her to come and live with him her heart yearned to go to this son of her adoption.

But she hesitated, and for his sake alone. She feared that her selfish offspring would deprive Wat of some of his rights and interfere with his comfort. She knew well the grasping, selfish nature of the one, the generous, kindly temperament of the other. Moreover, Eustace was in debt, and she hated the mere notion of his applying to his cousin for that pecuniary help, which she knew would be so lavishly and readily accorded.

However, circumstances were too strong for her.

Wat urged her to come to him for her sake, Eustace for his own, and between them she had no peace until she consented.

She was not sorry to go. She had been living in the cheerless and not particularly aristocratic region of Islington, in shabby genteel apartments, on very meagre fare, for she had to pinch and retrench in order that Master Eustace should be able to pay his club subscription, and wear patent leather boots, and lavender kid gloves, and an ultra shiny hat, and sundry other things, which he had been used to during his father's lifetime, and which he was too selfish to give up while he could possibly get them by fair means or foul.

He never gave a thought to the straits to which his poor mother was put. So long as he could idly sit a West-end club, drink brandy

and sodas, smoke fine cigars and play nap, he was content and did not care a maravedi who suffered for his extravagances.

The change was pleasant, indeed, to Anna Wycherley.

In her nephew's house she was virtually mistress. He showed her just as much reverence and respect, as though she had been in truth his mother, and never seemed tired of lavishing compliments, and comforts on her.

Despite her protestations, he bought her a little pill-box brougham, and a stout steady coach to draw it in which she could drive about the pretty country lanes in all weathers, defy the mist, and rain, and snow of winter, or the heat and dust of summer, he engaged her a maid, and gave his large staff of servants orders to obey her and look upon his aunt as their mistress.

She was deeply grateful for his kindness and consideration, and did her best to repay his thoughtful kindness by making his home as happy as it lay in her power to do.

She certainly looked after his interests pretty closely, and being a good woman of business, always saw his steward and settled matters in most cases without worrying him, for he hated business and liked to be out galloping his roan mare over hill and dale, lounging on the banks of a trout stream watching for its speckled inhabitants rise to a bite, or gun-in-hand tramp over the newly reaped fields, popping at the pheasants and partridges. Still, though he was fond of all *à fresco* sports and amusements, he was by no means a mere baccolio country squire.

He was well-read, well-informed, possessed a splendid library and spent some of his time in it coming over the works of great writers.

Then he was passionately fond of music, and sang with considerable taste and feeling, having a rich, round, baritone voice, and here, again his aunt helped him.

She was a fine musician, could read at sight, and she played all his accompaniments, always keeping her evenings disengaged, in order that she might be ready to play for him if he desired it.

He was keenly alive to her devotion. Keenly sensible of all she had done for him, ever since he was a chubby mite of three, so when she received the letter from some of her husband's people in Russia, asking her to give a home to Louva Westrupp, which perplexed and embarrassed her immensely, for of course she had no place of her own, and no power to offer the girl a shelter on the broad roof of Westcourt, Wat unhesitatingly declared she should come there, and live up the place with her merry laughter and gay ways.

Anna Wycherley was intensely grateful to him for his delicate tact and unfeigned good nature, and for the power he gave her to receive the orphan, in the place which was her home and his.

## CHAPTER II.

"Brown leaves, grey skies, bare trees,  
O fair little goddess in grey,  
You in the midst the spirit of these,  
Revealed to my eyes for a day."

LOUVA WESTRUPP arrived on a cold keen March day. The bitter wind was blustering through the leafless trees, roaring down the wide chimneys, twirling the crisp brown leaves of last year hither and thither, as it brushed by them with rough touch.

The flower beds were empty, the hedgerows bare, the fields unown, everywhere was there a look of sad desolation, everywhere on Mother Earth's wide breast that the great red sun, red and angry-looking, that was dropping down to rest in a bed of purple cloud, could do nothing to enliven.

Perhaps Louva, accustomed to the white, wide wastes of the Russian steppes, did not notice it.

At any rate she did not give a single glance around, but jumping out of the fly with the



agility of a fawn, or a panther, or any young feline, active thing, ran up the great broad, marble steps to the door, which was being held open by a solemn-looking old butler, and behind whom stood Mrs. Wycherley, amazedly depicted on her face, for she had not expected her young relative until next day.

"My dear Louva, this is a surprise," she exclaimed, holding out both hands and drawing the girl into a motherly embrace. "I thought you said Wednesday in your letter?"

"So I did, dear Madame Wycherley," replied Louva, with the least little bit of an accent, which was very pretty, and gave piquancy to her English. "But Madame Sinico's husband was telegraphed for to go to Paris, and I saw she was dying to go with him. So I told her I would start to-day for Westcourt. I thought you would not mind, dear Madame."

"Mind? I am delighted, child," replied Anna Wycherley, drawing her hand through her arm, and leading her into the green drawing-room—a small apartment, and her own especial sanctum, where at five o'clock she always dispensed tea to the young men or any visitors who might chance to be calling. "I am only sorry that I did not know, because I would have driven down to the station to meet you."

"I should not like to have given you so much trouble," said the girl, lifting her companion's slender white hand to her lips and kissing it in a pretty foreign fashion.

"It would have been no trouble, Louva. I drive every day. See, I have only just come in," pointing to a sable cloak and a bonnet that were lying on a sofa, and that her maid had not yet removed.

"I see. You are courageous to venture out on so cold a day."

"You surely don't feel the cold here, coming from Russia—so much more rigorous a climate."

"Not out of doors, dear Madame. But these English houses are so cold. Our small double windows and huge fireplaces and stoves are much more cosy."

"I see. Undoubtedly our houses are a trifle draughty. But, then, English people love fresh air."

"Yes. And they look fresher than my countrywomen."

"Remember, you are half English, Louva."

"I remember it well. My dear, dear father."

"Poor child! You still sorrow for him?"

"I shall never cease to do so. The best and kindest of parents."

"He was a very good man. I suppose you do not remember me? You were only three years old when you were over here before."

"No, dear Madame. I have no personal recollection of you, but I knew you at once from the photograph my dear father possessed of you."

"I see; and, dear child, you must not call me Madame. It is too formal!"

"I do not wish to be that," said the girl, looking at her with entreating grey eyes. "What shall I call you?"

"My name is Anna. I am your cousin—call me that."

"Too familiar. I should not dare to do that."

"Then call me aunt, like Wat does."

"With pleasure. But who is Wat?"

The grey eyes sought Mrs. Wycherley's again with enquiry in their soft depths this time.

"Wat? why, I told you when I wrote, my nephew, the master of Westcourt, Walter Wilson."

"I see, and you call him Wat? why?"

"It is the short for Walter."

"Ah, I understand. We do not shorten names in Russia."

"No, it is the other way about you add to them. Ivan Ivanovitch, for instance."

"Yes. We always speak of a man as the son of so-and-so."

"It explains who he is."

"Yes, and you, aunt," the unfamiliar word hanging a little on her tongue, "you have children?"

"Yes, one."

"Oh, I hope, I hope it is a girl, like me."

"No, dear child. Mine is a son, and he is more than double your age."

"Ah," sighed Louva, her face falling as she heard the chance of a merry congenial companion was gone.

"I am sorry it is not a daughter," smiled Mrs. Wycherley, "however I trust you won't be dull here. I am active for an old woman, and Wat will be glad of a companion in his rambles."

"I wonder why she does not say anything about her son?" thought Louva.

"My son Eustace," went on the elder lady as though in response to this unspoken thought, "is not so much at home. He is more of a wanderer," a slight shuddering on the kind motherly face, "Likes town better than the country, and often stays there."

"Oh, how can he?" exclaimed Louva, "the country is so much nicer. Moore open, free, fresh. In cities I always seem half stifled, by the impure air, and the great rows of houses shutting out the blue skies, and the absence of trees and flowers seem so triste. We lose so much of nature's beauties by living in cities."

"Quite right, my dear. I much prefer the country, and was only too delighted to come here when my nephew asked me to keep house for him."

"And this nephew," said the girl fixing her earnest grey eyes on her relative, "is he old?"

"What do you mean by old?" smiled Mrs. Wycherley.

"Is he old like my father. Bald, and wrinkled and—steepted."

"Certainly not. He is older than you, by some years. Let me see how old are you?"

"I shall be sixteen in June," with a slight up-lifting of the head, as though she thought the dignity of womanhood would be hers then.

"Yes. Well then Wat is seven years older than you are."

"Only seven years," with a little air of disappointment.

"Yes. He is twenty-three. Why do you look disappointed?"

"I hardly know. Only I thought the masters of such a big place as this would be old, venerable, majestic."

"Wat is certainly not that," laughed Mrs. Wycherley. "He is very tall yet not majestic, ruddy complexion, blue eyes, fair hair."

"Very handsome, I suppose."

"Not at all," returned his aunt quickly. "He is almost ugly."

"With blue eyes?" asked the little Russian.

"Yes, despite his blue eyes, though they are beautiful enough in themselves, his features are irregular, and his face too round. Still he has a most frank and honest expression, and that is better than good looks," declared the mother thinking of her own handsome son, who was only "fair without," and lacked those better attributes of a noble heart and generous mind.

"And all this belongs to him?" looking out of the window across the flowerless garden, to the park where the great gaunt trees, waved their leafless branches in the wild March winds.

"All that you can see and a great deal more beside."

"He must be very, very rich."

"He is well off."

"And possesses everything he desires of course?"

"I am not sure of that," said the elder lady, gravely. "Few people possess all they desire. Money cannot buy everything."

"No, not health, or happiness or—life," sighed Louva, thinking of that dear father who had slipped away to the land of shadows, despite all the money lavished on doctors and

dainties, rare wines, but which could not put health into the wasted frame.

"True, Walter has one thing which is better than wealth."

"What is that?"

"A sweet and amiable disposition."

"Is he very good?"

"Very."

"Then I shall love him," declared the girl, lifting the singularly earnest grey eyes to Mrs. Wycherley's face.

"I hope you will. He deserves to be loved, and I am glad to hear you say that."

"Why, aunt?"

"Because I have been hoping you and he will be good friends, and also because it is the first childlike thing I have heard you say."

"Childlike?"

"Yes. You strike me as being old for your age."

"That is having been so much with father. I seldom saw or played with other children."

"That would account for it. You are only a child, you know."

"I shall be sixteen in June," she told her companion again, with an amusing assumption of dignity.

"Well, do you call that being a woman?"

"Elspeth told me I should be one when I reached that age."

"Pooh, dear. In England, we reckon girls, and boys too, infants, until they are twenty-one, why when I was your age I was at school, working hard at languages, and the ologies."

"My education is finished."

"So I heard from your aunt Madame Petroff."

"Father taught me a great deal."

"Yes, I suppose you have lived in a sort of moral forcing house, which has made you old for your age, now I shall try and make you young again."

"How?" asked Louva rather anxiously.

"You don't mean to send me to school?"

"Certainly not, I shall let you rove about the gardens and park, play tennis, ride a pony, go to the farmyard, and if you like you shall have some chicks of your own, and a pair of white rabbits."

"May I really? Oh how delightful!" exclaimed the girl, whose nature was childish in some respects, though her training and the unfortunate early loss of her parents, had developed some of her faculties abnormally, notably a capacity for loving and suffering.

"I am glad you like the idea of having some pets."

"I do. I love animals."

"Both my boys, as I call them, have several dogs, so you will have to share those with them."

"Share what?" exclaimed a masculine voice, and turning with a start Mrs. Wycherley saw both the boys standing in the doorway of her sanctum, scanning the little Russian eagerly.

They had been out hunting, and both looked remarkably well in pink, though of course Eustace's handsome presence eclipsed his cousin's more homely face and features.

"Share what?" he repeated, advancing into the room, his eyes still fixed on Louva, with curiosity and latent antagonism in their dark depths.

"I was speaking of your and Wat's dogs," replied his mother suavely. "Telling Louva that as there were so many here already she would have to share in the pleasure of them."

"I see. So this is Louva," he remarked, smiling and showing his white teeth, that gleamed under his heavy moustache. "Welcome little cousin."

"Thank you," she said, shyly, somewhat dazzled and abashed by his air of patronage, good looks, and critical glance, as she put a small red hand into his outstretched palm.

"I am glad you are come," said Walter, simply, as he in his turn took her hand, and held it in such a warm, close, friendly clasp, "and I hope you will find Westcourt a happy home."

"Thank you. You are very kind," and she dared to raise her eyes to his rugged face, and

took comfort from its kindly look and expression.

"The kindness is yours in coming to us," he told her, smiling. "We look to you to liven us up, and make us merry, don't we Aunt Anna?"

"Certainly. Louva is to be gay as a lark." "Please don't expect me to be very bright," she said, with a half-timid glance at her grey dress, for she was still in mourning for her father.

"You will be after a time," said Wat, quickly understanding the glance, and pitying her, for though Mrs. Wycherley had been most devoted to him ever since he was three years old, and though he had no recollection of his mother, and only the faintest, haziest remembrance of his father, he still yearned for them, and regretted their early loss. "You must consider this quite as your own home, and do exactly as you like about everything, and tell us if there is anything you want or wish for."

"You are very kind," she said again, for she was yet too much of a child to be anything save shy and embarrassed in the society of young men, and did not quite know what she ought to say.

"Will you have cream in your tea," asked Eustace, who had been standing by his mother while she poured out the fragrant amber-coloured liquid, and now stood beside her cup in hand, "or do you prefer it Russian fashion with lemon in it?"

"I am used to it with lemon," she replied, blushing to the roots of her rough hair, that was distressingly near red in colour, "but I must get accustomed to it in English fashion, so I will take cream, please."

"That is right," observed her cousin, as he liberally creamed and sugared the cup he held. "There is nothing like accustoming oneself to ones surroundings."

"Still if you prefer lemon," put in Walter, "I will have some brought in. There is no necessity for you to take anything you don't like."

"Thank you," she replied, raising her great grey eyes, the only really good feature in her plain face to his, "but I like this very much. It is nicer than the other I think."

"Of course it is," said Eustace, decisively, dropping into a chair at her side, and lashing his mud-bespattered boots with his hunting-crop. "English ways, manners, customs are better than those of other countries. Infinitely better, incomparably superior."

"A sweeping assertion to make to a woman who is half a Russian," observed his mother.

"You don't call Louva a woman, mater, surely?" he laughed.

"I am sixteen in June," she hastened to tell him, with an air of dignity that made even good-natured Wat smile.

She looked such a very little girl in her short ill-made gown of grey Russian cloth, that displayed a pair of thick shapeless boots, and was gathered round the neck in such a close fashion that it gave her the appearance of having a humped back, while the sleeves dragged upwards in a queer manner displaying a good deal of bony wrist, and a pair of small, well-shaped, but extremely red hands, that looked as though the cold, pitiless wind of her northern birth-place, had permanently chapped and roughened them.

The skin of her face was also red and roughened, though here and there it showed that delicate fairness that generally goes with auburn hair.

The little bit of forehead between the fuzz of red locks that hung over it and the eyebrows, clearly defined and delicately pencilled, was very white; so were the chin and sides of the cheeks near the throat, and the glimpses of neck seen now and then when she moved, and her ill-made frock bulged and disclosed it, showed it to be of the whitest and fairest.

For the rest, her features were irregular, her mouth a trifle too wide, though that was compensated for by the even, beautiful teeth displayed when she smiled; and her eyes were

large-pupilled, black-lashed, and well-placed, and would have redeemed almost any face from plainness, only hers was so terribly red, and with its frame of ruddy hair seemed all in a blaze.

"Pooh! You are only a little girl," ridiculed Eustace; "a mere child!" though in his heart he hardly thought so, for there was something in her earnest eyes that forbade the idea of extreme youth or childhood.

"I am getting older every day," she exclaimed rather piteously.

"Of course you are," said the master of Westcourt, soothingly. "You will be a dignified young lady quite soon enough."

"And when you are, my dear," remarked Mrs. Wycherley, "and well on in the thirties, you will wish, oh, so terribly hard and uselessly, that you were a child again, and only fifteen."

"I don't know," she said, slowly. "Age is honourable. I should like to be honoured."

"So you will be some day," Wat told her.

"You'll have an adoring husband," sneered Eustace, thinking no man would ever care to possess such very red locks as his own private property.

"Don't talk nonsense!" said his mother quite sharply, an angry frown on her usually placid brow, for she felt if Eustace began to talk of love, and lovers and husbands, to this girl, it would be an unfortunate thing for her, and that she might say good-bye to happiness.

Many women had loved her son and his handsome face, and had not been the better or the happier for it. She wished to save Louva from his unhealthy influence.

"And, Louva, you had better come to your room with me. You will want some dress unpacked for dinner. I will tell Mason to come and get things ready for you."

"Yes, aunt," replied the girl, obediently rising and following Mrs. Wycherley.

"Wat, is the house well insured?" asked Eustace as the door closed after his mother and cousin with airy insolence.

"Yes. Why?" "Because that child will set it on fire if you don't look out. By Jove! what an ugly little creature it is!"

"I differ with you," said Walter, coldly. "She has splendid eyes; and in a few years will be very handsome, in an uncommon, captivating style, more fascinating than ordinary good looks."

"It will be very uncommon," sneered the elder man as he rose, and sauntered out of the room to doff his pink and don swallow-tails.

### CHAPTER III.

"An empty sky, a world of heather,  
Purple of foxglove, yellow of broom;  
We two among them wading together,  
Shaking out honey, treading perfume.  
Crowds of bees are giddy with clover;  
Crowds of grasshoppers skip at our feet;  
Crowds of larks at their matins hang over,  
Thanking the Lord for a life so sweet."

MISS WESTRUPP looked more presentable when she appeared in the drawing-room at seven o'clock.

Mason, the lady's maid, had combed and brushed the rebellious red locks that barely reached to her shoulders, and confined them with a broad black ribbon.

She had found a thin black dress in one of the big trunks that had come over from Russia, and induced the child to put it on, though at first she had strenuously objected, on the score of its being her only "party dress."

However, the clever and astute abigail won the day, and Louva appeared in the green dress that was open a little way at the throat, and showed the white neck, clasped by a jet collar, while the thick boots were replaced by thin shoes, that displayed the taper ankles and prettily slender feet to advantage. But the

hands and wrists were again displayed by short sleeves, and remained hopelessly red and unlovely.

"Allow me," said Wat, offering her his arm with the utmost deference and politeness, as the butler announced dinner, and leading her into the dining-room, he placed her beside him, while Eustace took his mother in and sat at the other end of the long table, divided by the breadth of mahogany, and a galaxy of lovely hothouse flowers, from the child with the flaming hair, that he thought so ugly and gauche, and whom he watched with considerable amusement, for, like most of her countrymen and women, she had a healthy appetite, and did not hesitate to satisfy it, while Walter, looking upon her as a child, and wishing to make her feel at home and at ease, pressed everything on her, and when dessert was progressing, literally loaded her plate with all kinds of indigestible dainties and bonbons, all of which she devoured with the greatest *sans froid* and unconcernedness of the amused looks of Eustace, and the rather displeased ones of Anna Wycherley, who was mentally deciding she must take her ward in hand, and give her some lessons in ladylike restriction as to the amount of *dragées* and *marron glacés* to be consumed at the dinner table.

"When are you coming to the drawing-room?" asked Louva of Wat, as Mrs. Wycherley got up from the table.

"I shall come at once if you are going to sing," declared the young man, jumping up. "I am too fond of music to miss a single bar when I have the opportunity of listening to any."

"Well, I am not going to be left here alone," laughed Eustace, rising too. "I shall come and listen to your sweet strains, and twirls, and cadences."

He spoke rather sarcastically, for he thought her singing would be a very poor display.

Moreover, he did not in the least care for music, only he was of a curiously jealous, nervous temperament, and he was very jealous of his cousin, and hated the notion of his being a greater favourite with anyone than himself, or of Wat's gaining anything that he could win for himself.

So though it bored him considerably, he determined that Walter should not be more to his cousin than he was, and set himself to work to win the child's liking for himself, in order to keep the other out of it.

Walter at once opened the piano, and asked Louva if she had her music, or wished it fetched.

"I play and sing chiefly without my notes," she replied, and struck the opening bars of a quaint Russian melody, and then her voice rang out clear, full, rich—a wonderful voice for such a mere child, and Wat stood spell-bound, drinking in every word.

"Thank you," he said, with a sigh of delight, when she finished.

"Not bad for a little girl," said Eustace, with his cynical smile, that somehow or other seemed to wound and pain her.

She would have liked to hear some words of praise from those handsome lips, win a look of approval from those deep, tender eyes, that so belied the man's real character and nature.

"I shall improve as I grow older," she said, hastily, the red colour in her cheeks deepening to brickdust.

"Of course you will," said Walter, warmly.

"Your voice is not thoroughly formed yet." "That is what father used to say," she rejoined, in evident pleasure, "and if I studied hard, that I should get more flexibility."

"Naturally hard study will do that. You must have a first rate master."

"May I have a master, aunt?" she appealed, clasping her hands with a little foreign gesture.

"Certainly, my dear, if you wish it."

"I do very, very much."

"Then you shall have one."

"When? Soon."



"As soon as we can get one eh, aunt," said Wat.

"Of course."  
"Won't you sing something in English?" suggested Eustace.

"Yes, if you like."  
"I should like it infinitely better than anything in Russian, as I don't understand a word in that tongue."

"Do you like this?" She began, "When other hearts," which she sang with great taste and feeling, though it hardly suited her voice as well as the Muscovite melody.

"Yes, that is more to my taste. To tell you the truth, Louva, I don't care a bit for songs in an outlandish jargon which conceals their gist and meaning. I like plain honest English. I am sure that is why Antoinette Sterling is such an immense favourite in the English public. She sings simple ballads in our own tongue, and we understand and appreciate them."

"You seem to forget that the outlandish jargon in which your cousin sang is as much her mother tongue as English, more so in fact, for besides having a Russian mother she was born in Moscow, and has lived there the best part of her life," remarked his mother, that shade darkening her placid face, that his rash and thoughtless speeches so often brought there, chasing the sunshine from her eyes, and the smile from her lips.

"Ah, yes, I did forget. But the child speaks such good English, with only now and then the least bit of an accent that I forgot she wasn't one of us, and a true born Briton."

"But I am one of you," she cried, hastily. "My dear, dear father was thoroughly English and I will learn some more songs of your country, at once, as soon as I can get them."

"Do. I shall like to listen to you," said Eustace, condescendingly, for her readiness to please him flattered his vanity.

"I will sing to you whenever you wish it," she told him humbly.

"And to me too?" queried Wat, over whose frank face, a shadow was also stealing fainter and less well-defined than that on his aunt's, yet nevertheless distinctly to be seen.

"Oh, yes."

"I shall be ready to listen to anything even if you chant me something in Hindostanee."

"I don't know that language," she replied, with the utmost gravity. "But I know Latin," and she began the *Kyrie Eleison* singing part of it without any accompaniment.

"Capital," smiled Eustace.

"Divine," murmured Walter.

"What is your religion, Coz?" queried the former, "that chant looks as though you belonged to the church of Rome and adored the Pope."

"She is Protestant, of course," said his mother indignantly.

"Of course," echoed the child, quietly. "Father was of that religion."

"And your mother?"

"Belonged to the Greek church."

"I see."

"And what are you?" she asked, seriously, fixing her great earnest eyes on his handsome, reckless face.

"Nothing!"

"Nothing!" she echoed, horror depicted on her quaint ruddy visage.

"Well, an agnostic then, if you like that better."

"An agnostic?" she repeated, vaguely.

"Yes. One who knows nothing. Therefore neither affirms nor denies Christianity or any other creed, dogma or religion."

"I see," she said, in rather a bewildered fashion.

"Do you understand?" he inquired, smiling and stroking his moustache, a trick he indulged in when he was vastly amused.

"No-o. I don't think I do," she admitted.

"Well, listen to me. Christianity is—"

"Don't talk your infidel nonsense to the child," interrupted his mother, brusquely.

"Louva, it is time for you to go to bed. Come,

my dear, I will take you up. Say good-night to your cousins."

Mrs. Wycherley was careful to make no difference between the young men to the girl. She wished her to look on them both as near relatives, and not to regard Wat as a stranger. However, she rather failed in her endeavour.

Whether the tie of consanguinity, existing between Louva and Eustace had anything to do with it or not it is impossible to say, but as the days wore away, it became evident that she liked her cousin far better than she did Walter Wilson.

She was always friendly with the latter, always willing to sing to him, to walk with him, ride with him on the pretty pony he had bought her, play tennis, or do anything else he wished, yet her face never brightened at his approach as it did when Wycherley came near her, she was not so tremulously, desperately anxious to please him as she was the other, and she did not seek his society as she did her cousin's. She would follow him about like a dog, somewhat to her guardian's dismay, for she saw breakers ahead for the girl, and yet knew not how to prevent her shipwrecking her happiness.

Eustace was a fixture at Westcourt, at any rate for the present. There was no reason why he should leave it even temporarily, and had there been it is probable he would not have gone. There was a strong spice of the devil in his temperament, and he had a very decided taste for flirtation and fun, never stopping to count the cost of the game to his partner, only amusing himself and passing the time, and his quaint, little cousin proved that she had individuality enough to be entertaining.

Moreover, it was virgin soil that he had to work on. No man had ever whispered words of love to Louva, or pressed her hand, or looked into her eyes, or told her that she was all in all to him, and he counted it rather good fun and pleasant pastime to see the colour steal up to the roots of her ruddy hair, and the heavy long-lashed lids droop over the grey eyes, and the soft lips quiver at his touch or some light, gay word.

Other women had blushed at his touch and drooped their eyes shyly 'neath his glance. Often, only too often had he seen rosy lips quiver at the close proximity of his own. Others had loved him, and been none the better or happier for their love, though they were probably wiser. Still he found this child-woman the freshest, sweetest little creature he had ever met with, and her innocent homage was dear flattery to his vain soul, she looked up to him as an epitome of wisdom and knowledge, and believed implicitly all he told her though a good deal of his talk was a farrago of nonsense and extravagant rubbish. Only to her it seemed beautiful as they strolled together through the park, and meadows, and lanes that showed by their bright livery of tender green that spring had come, as fair, as glad, as joyous as that which bloomed in the child's heart. And as her feet strayed through the clover, and she listened to the larks singing joyously overhead in the blue vault of heaven, and heard her cousin's half-whispered words, she felt that for the first time she lived and knew what bliss was.

A bliss so perfect and ecstatic that it was akin to pain. Before she had only existed, she had been asleep. It was this Prince Charming who had aroused her slumbering soul, who had awakened her heart, swept its strings with his ardent touch, drawing forth its sweetest music.

Poor Louva! Hard, indeed, must have been the man or woman, who would have grudged her that short period of ecstatic bliss, of perfect happiness, so complete that it seldom falls to the lot of mortals to enjoy it, and which, she in her wildest dreams had never pictured, never believed, never thought such a lover could care for her. So handsome, so fascinating, so perfect in the eyes of gulleless fifteen!

## CHAPTER IV.

"A summer sea, a smiling sky,  
Never a ripple, and never a frown,  
Never a token of shipwreck nigh,  
What did it matter? my bark went down."

"WHAT do you think of it?"  
"It is beautiful. Exquisite!"

Eustace Wycherley asked the question, Louva Westrupp answered it.

He was seated on a three-legged stool before an easel, on which stood a rough sketch of that part of the park and the river that twined like a ribbon of steel between the green fertile banks; and on whose bright surface the pollard willows were mirrored back, and the gleaming laces of the bulrushes, as they swayed to and fro in the gentle wind, and struck against the quivering reeds and touched now and again the silver-chaliced water-lilies that floated on its bosom.

The sun, not too warmly, but gratefully glinted down through the thick leafage of the old trees, and threw chequered golden patches on the trim sward. White fleecy-like clouds drifted overhead, across the blue vault of Heaven, there was the hum of myriad bees, the "whir whir" of myriad winged creatures, and coming faintly from a great height floated the song of the lark, as she warbled away her joy at the gate of Heaven, a joy all creation shared, for even the river seemed to laugh and rejoice as it glinted along, it's sunlit ripples sparkling like rain-bow hued diamonds, and the jubilant lilt of the thrush and black-bird mingled with the far away note of the lark.

"I am not satisfied with it."

"You are too severe in criticising your own work."

"That is exactly what we ought to be, *chere cousine*."

"Surely not; when it is perfect?"

"This is not perfect," laughed Eustace, though he was pleased at her homage to his talent.

And talent he certainly possessed, to delineate landscape, though he was too careless and too idle to make any use of the real gift and only "faded," over it, painting a little now and again when the fancy seized him. It had seized him that bright June weather.

It was so pleasant to idle in the park, under the shade of the greenwood tree, and equally pleasant to have a devoted admirer of the fair sex, ready to tell him everything he did, no matter how crude and rough, was "exquisite."

He liked to sit there on his rickety three-legged stool, and have Louva stand beside him and praise his work. Liked it better than he had any idea of.

He knew she looked at him quite as often, if not oftener, than she did at the picture. But he didn't object to that at all. On the contrary, he approved of it.

He thought his face more worthy of admiration than anything his pencil could produce, and he put on a sentimental look or smiled sweetly when he was conscious of her glance; the glance of those great, grave, earnest eyes, that somehow or other held such a curious charm for him—a charm which he only half realised.

For, to tell the truth, he never dreamed that she would look upon this flirtation as serious, she seemed to him such a little girl, awkward, gauche, childish. He never once looked at her in the light of a woman, or he might perhaps have hesitated before talking such an amount of sentimental rubbish to her.

Might and might not, for men of his type often chatter mock-sentiment to children that are bordering on womanhood, carelessly and selfishly forgetting that what is sport to them is death to their unfortunate quarry, and that all the brightness goes out of life for the "child."

"This is not perfect," he repeated.

"It is in my eyes," she responded, in low tones.

"Would you like to have it?" he asked, indifferently.

"Oh, so very, very much," she cried, clasping her hands together in delight. "May I?"

"Why, of course you may, childie," he smiled, getting up from the stool and standing beside her.

"Thank you, a thousand times."

"Why do you think so much of me, Louva?"

"I—I don't know," she murmured, shyly, the quick colour reddening cheek and brow as usual.

"It is very good of you, little one. I shall never forget these hours spent with you."

"Neither shall I," she breathed, hardly above a whisper, while her heart beat furiously under her white bodice.

"I wish I was clever at figures," he went on, looking at her critically, for she pleased his fastidious eye that afternoon, her white cambric frock, made by Mason's skilful fingers, fitted her slight figure admirably, and looked cool and dainty, her broad-leaved sun hat was trimmed with pale blue ribbons and hid her too brilliant hair, and her skin was much paler than when she had first come to England, and looked not one whit too bright in contrast with the snowy dress, while the bunch of forget-me-nots at her breast relieved its colourless monotony.

"Why?" she asked, lifting her eyes to his and dropping them at once.

"Because I would paint you, just as you stand there now, and call it 'Summer's Queen.'"

"Would you?" she asked, delightedly.

"Yes, and I should keep the picture always in remembrance of you and the happiest days of my life."

"Oh! Eustace," she gasped, overcome by this fine piece of sentiment.

"Don't you believe me, Louva?" going a little nearer.

"Oh, yes," she assured him.

"I should prize that, but there is something else I should prize more."

"What is that?" she asked, unguardedly.

"A kiss," he replied, passionately. "Childie, you have never given me one, though we are cousins. Won't you now?"

He threw his arm round her and drew her close to him, while his lips sought hers in a long, ardent caress, and when he released her she was white to the lips, and her eyes had lost the cloudless, child-like look that had distinguished them before, while he felt that he had made somewhat of a false step and a fool of himself, and set to work busily to collect his painting paraphernalia, and on the way home he was less talkative and lover-like than usual, while as to the girl she was silent from pure delight.

From the minute his kiss touched her lips a bright, beautiful hope leapt to birth in her heart—a hope that one day she would be his wife, the bearer of his name, the sharer of his troubles, his nearest and dearest and best beloved.

However, there was nothing of that in her cousin's mind, and he was a trifle languid and bored at dinner-time until Walter attracted his attention by saying,—

"I saw some old friends of yours to-day?"

"Indeed. Who?" he asked, indifferently.

"Lady Grace Halesmere and her daughters."

"Ah, really!" and his handsome face grew animated at once, and he lost the languid manner of boredom. "Where did you see them?"

"They are staying at her cousin's, Lord Templemore's."

"Within an easy ride. I must go over there to-morrow!"

"So soon?" said Wat, in some surprise.

"Yes. I could not let them be in the neighbourhood and not call."

"Of course not. But are you going to pick up the dropped thread of last year?" enquired the master of Westcott, with a half glance at Louva, who was listening intently.

"*Cela dépend!*" smiled Eustace.

"You mean if the lady is willing?"

"Yes. I have little doubt that she will be," said Wycherley, with his accustomed insolent conceit.

"You are very sure."

"Naturally. We said all sorts of charming things to each other last year."

"Last year is not this year," his cousin reminded him.

"No; but Lady Kate is not the sort of woman to love for a day; rather for ever."

"Then, you suppose she does love you?"

"Really, my dear fellow, I can't say. I have never asked her."

"Do you mean to ask her now?"

"Perhaps," laughed the scamp.

"And do you mean to marry her?" chimed in his mother.

"That goes without saying mother mine," he rejoined. Yet, as he spoke, he glanced a trifle uneasily at Louva, who had become deathly pale.

"I don't see it," she said, tartly. "You have flirted with so many. It seems to me that you will never settle down," and she too looked at the girl.

"Ah; I am serious this time!" he said, carelessly, as he got up from the table, and sauntering out to the terrace lit a cigar, and stood smoking it and contemplating the landscape.

"I—I want to speak with you!"

Turning with a start he found his cousin by his side.

"So it has come already," he murmured between his teeth.

"Certainly!" he said, aloud, facing round, and putting his hands in his pockets, he leaned against the balustrade. "What is it you want to say?"

"I—I want to know if it is true?"

"If what is true?" he replied, nonchalantly, flicking the ash off the end of his cigar.

"That you—you—are going to ask some one to—marry you?"

"Yes, it is quite true," he told her with cool audacity, feeling that it was useless to prevaricate with those searching grey eyes on him.

"And—and—you—you—love her?"

"Well—yes—I suppose I do. At any rate I admire her immensely. She is good form and good style from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot."

"And you met her last year?"

"Yes."

"Before you ever—saw—me?"

"Yes."

"Then why—could you not spare me?"

"Spare you, Louva?" he repeated, looking at her white angry face, and wishing devoutly he had never played at love making with her.

"Why break my heart? I had never done anything to you, never injured you. Why should you spoil and ruin my life?"

"Spoil your life!" he ejaculated. "Surely you don't care like that?"

"How do you know? How can you tell what I feel? Oh! false and cruel. Have you no pity? I am so young. Ah! my life lies before me—a waste!"

"My dear Louva," he began, soothingly.

"Don't call me that," she cried, furiously.

"I am not dear to you, I never was. You fooled me from the first moment you saw me. I was young, inexperienced, you thought it fine sport to win my heart, only to throw it back to me when you wearied of the game. You might have spared me. You might have left me happy as you found me. But you shall rue this day, Eustace. My hour will come, and when it does expect no pity from me. Ask none, for you will not get it," and turning away she went into the house to the solitude of her own chamber, and left him cursing his luck and his folly at having amused himself with her.

## CHAPTER V.

"Charity itself fulfils the law,  
And who can sever love from Charity?"

THE next morning, Eustace, after a very careful toilet, mounted his grey, and cantered off to Templemore.

It was a pleasant day, and the road lay through pleasant rural scenes; but Wycherley hardly saw them, or at any rate did not note any of the beauties of land or sky.

He was just a trifle uneasy, though he hardly knew why. Still his conscience did reproach him for the part he had played towards Louva.

He felt like a scoundrel, and no man cares to do that. It hurts his self love, and makes him feel small. Notwithstanding that he told himself over and over again it was his cousin's fault a great deal more than his.

She should not have been so foolish and childish as to take a little harmless badinage as serious love making.

What was the world and women coming to? A fellow couldn't speak civilly to a girl without her imagining that he wanted to marry her.

It was awfully hard lines, it was abominable. The best thing he could do was to get married. Then if he did pay attentions to the fair frail ones of his acquaintance at any rate they could not misunderstand them, and thank he meant matrimony.

Lady Kate would be an excellent match for him. She was handsome, well-bred, well-connected, her people had plenty of influence in high quarters.

Her uncle, Lord Templemore, would help him to fame and fortune if he chose a parliamentary life, and she had five hundred a year, so that would keep them going comfortably, if not luxuriously until her relatives' interest had procured him a lucrative post.

She was tall, slight, aristocratic, elegant, the sort of wife who would be a splendid help-meat for a cabinet minister, and his vanity and ambition led him to believe that he might some day obtain even that high position, then he thought of Louva, childish, unformed, ill-dressed, passionate, ugly, and with that terrible hair, and he absolutely shuddered.

How could he have been such a fool!

However it was all over. He had told her he meant to marry another woman, and that ended it all as far as he was concerned. So he galloped up the avenue at Templemore in desperate haste, eager to see the woman he was bent upon making his wife.

Lord Templemore was at home and made some graceful apologies for the absence of his sister and two of her daughters.

"One of the girls is in the rose-garden, I believe," observed his lordship after a little desultory conversation.

"Which one? Do you know?" asked his guest quickly.

"Kate, I believe," replied her uncle.

"Would you like to go and join her?"

"I should very much," replied the young man with unmistakable alacrity. "We were such excellent friends last year in town. I trust our friendship may be renewed on the same charming terms."

"Humph!" was all the old nobleman said, yet a queer smile curved his sarcastic mouth as Eustace hurried towards the rose-garden, where a glimpse of a white dress could be seen now and again.

Lady Kate was standing by a rose-tree, her white jewelled fingers flashing here and there amongst its green leaves as she rifled it of its choicest blossoms. The sun shone down on her bare golden head and white flawless skin, lingered lovingly in the dark blue eyes, tinged her delicate cheek with a pink colour like the tint in a sea-shell, surrounded her with a sort of halo, a glory that gave her beauty an unearthly splendour.

"Lady Kate, do you remember me?" said the young man eagerly, as he stood before her with extended hand.

"Yes, perfectly, Mr. Wycherley," she re-



plied with easy grace. "I have an excellent memory."

"I am so glad. I was afraid you had forgotten me."

"Why?"

She asked the question coolly in her low well-bred tones, while her eyes sought his questioning, with none of that soft shyness that distinguished poor Louva's looks.

"It is some time since we met."

"Whose fault is that?" she queried gaily, for he had promised to return to London and visit them, but had broken that promise as he broke many others, and the cause of his doing so, was a French actress, a woman with a wild temper, a bold handsome face, and not a shred of reputation, who fascinated him for a while and chained him to her side in Paris all through the winter, making him forget everything else while the spell lasted and he basked in the sunshine of her bought smiles. The spell was broken now. He had recovered his senses as far as Clairette D'Egmont was concerned, and was ready to make the running again with Lady Kate, only he was not aware that she knew all about Clairette and was extremely angry that he should have gone straight from her side and an interchange of meaning, if not actually tender speeches with her to this bold painted creature, who changed her lovers as often as a fashionable woman changes her gowns in the season. It hurt her pride, which was intense though fortunately her heart escaped, for she was not, luckily for herself of a susceptible temperament.

"My fault," he admitted at once with graceful frankness. "Urgent private affairs took me abroad and kept me there, a most reluctant exile (was it fancy, or did he see the fair Kate's haughty lips curl into a sneer). I did not return to England until after Christmas."

"So I was told," she remarked, a curious inflexion in her voice which somehow or other impressed him unpleasantly. "And after?"

"After I heard you were in Scotland with Douglas of Craigmair's people."

"Quite correct. We were there until May."

"Well, don't you see," he went on a little desperately for her calm, cool critical look embarrassed him. "I couldn't come after you there."

"No."

"I don't know the Douglas's."

"I am aware of that. They are very exclusive."

There was something very insolent in this speech, for it seemed to imply that he was beneath the level of her Scotch friends acquaintances and guests, but he passed it over without remark or comment.

"I have been longing to see you, Lady Kate," he said, with a certain amount of ardour, for she was very fair to look upon, and Lord Templemore was a cabinet minister, and Eustace was ambitious.

"Really?" she laughed, incredulously.

"Yes; really. Don't you believe me?"

"I am sorry to be rude, yet I must be honest and say I do not," she replied, coolly tucking a rose into the bosom of her dress.

"I have really. We were such good friends last season. We had so many pleasant hours together."

"And how many pleasant hours had you with other women last season?" she asked.

"None that were as pleasant to me as those passed in your society," he declared, boldly.

"Oh! Mr. Wycherley," she smiled, incredulously.

"It is a fact, surely, Lady Kate you know that I loved you then, that I love you now most devotedly," he said, in tender tones trying to imprison her slender white fingers in his.

"I know nothing of the sort," she retorted, quickly, "and I must request you not to speak to me in such terms!"

"Why not? Have I not every lover's privilege of pleading my cause, that cause which is so near my heart?"

"Because I only accord Sir Marcus Grafton that privilege," she told him, a malicious little sparkle in her blue eyes.

"Sir Marcus Grafton," he repeated, in some bewilderment.

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

His lips quivered as he put the question, and his cheek grew pale.

"My affianced husband."

"Lady Kate!" he exclaimed, looking overwhelmed with anger and mortification.

"It is a fact. We were engaged last October, and we are to be married next month, at the end of the season."

"Then you were only fooling me?" he cried, furiously.

"I never for a moment imagined you would take a foolish flirtation *au sérieux*," she replied.

"It was something more than a flirtation."

"Not in my eyes," with a haughty uplifting of the regal head.

"I thought you cared for me?"

"You were wrong."

"You are heartless!"

"Not at all. One must amuse oneself," she laughed, coolly.

"How could you be so cruel, Lady Kate?"

"How could you be so ridiculous, Mr. Wycherley, as to mistake an affair of a season for a serious and lasting matter?"

"I have never been so much mistaken in a woman before."

"Possibly not. Only I have no doubt many women have been mistaken in you."

"What do I care if they have been?"

"And what do I care if you have been?"

"Nothing at all. You are heartless."

"By no means."

"I say you are."

"Sir Marcus will tell you I am loving and affectionate to the last degree. Ask him?"

"I shall do nothing of the kind, and I only hope you will never feel as miserable as you have made me feel to-day."

"I hope not, I'm sure; you do look rather wretched."

"That pleases your vanity. Good-bye!" offering his hand gallily.

"Won't you stay and see mother?"

"No, thank you; I'm not in the humour for talking common-places."

"Well, good-bye, then. I hope the next time we meet you will be in a better temper."

"And I hope we shall never meet again?" with which ungracious speech he turned away, and, mounting his horse that a groom had been walking up and down, he rode off to Westcourt at a break-neck pace, feeling that his luck was not in the ascendant, for, between the woman who loved him and the woman who did not love him, he was in an awkward fix, and didn't quite see his way out of the matter comfortably.

His equanimity was further disturbed on his arrival at Westcourt by its young master's badinage.

"Well, Eustace, what luck?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" growled his cousin.

"Is the lady willing?"

"Haven't asked her," he replied, savagely, telling the lie without a shade of compunction, for Louva's eyes were fixed on his face.

"Oh, didn't you?"

"No."

"Changed your mind, eh?"

"Yes."

"Sorry for that, aren't we, Louva?" said Wat, cheerily, for, guessing how the land lay, and how sore the child's heart was, he had been, trying all day assiduously to cheer her up, and make her forget his scamp of a cousin. "We were looking forward to a wedding."

"Yes," she said in low tones.

"Then I am afraid you will be disappointed," sneered Eustace; "at any rate, as far as I am concerned, for I have no intention of marrying at present. If you want wedding festivities, you had better get them up yourselves."

"Perhaps we shall," retorted Wat, stealing a covert glance at Louva, for she looked so pale and sad, he pitied her immensely, and would have done anything to have helped her over this trial of the heart which threatened to shadow her young life.

"Wish you joy," snapped Wycherley.

"What are you going to do?" continued Wilson, who knew when Eustace was in his present frame of mind that he invariably left the Court.

"Go abroad."

"Where to?"

"All round the world. Anywhere!"

"That will take you a long time."

"That won't matter. If only I weren't so confoundedly poor, I would start to-night for America!"

"Want of money need not stop you," said Walter in a low tone, crossing over to him, and bending down to whisper in his ear. "I will be your banker. Let me know how much you want to start with. Come and talk it over in the smoking-room."

They went, and as one young man was eager to leave England for reasons that are pretty well known to the reader, and the other young man was anxious to get him out of England for reasons best known to himself, they soon arranged matters satisfactorily; and on the following day Eustace, after taking a brief farewell of his mother, and a briefer and more constrained one of Louva, drove off in the phaeton with Wat to catch the London express at Stanhope, which was to be his first step on the road to America, where he declared he meant to stay for some years.

## CHAPTER VI.

"For loving looks grow hard and cold,  
Fair heads are turned away,  
When the fruit has been gathered—the tale been told,  
And each dog has had his day."

"WELL really, I can hardly believe it."

"Believe what, aunt?" asked Walter Wilson.

"That Eustace is coming home at last," replied Mrs. Wycherley perusing the letter she held in her hand.

"It is about time he did," remarked her nephew, with a little wry grimace, for the demands made upon his generosity and purse during the last three years by his cousin had been more frequent than pleasant.

"I think so. It really is too bad, Wat, the way he has blebbed you. You are too good-natured!"

"Not at all!" exclaimed the young man, hastily, for he had had a secret reason for wishing and keeping Eustace out of the way. "Of course it is well for him to see the world. Remember what a grand tour I took."

"That is a different thing. You are a rich man, and can gratify your fads. He is a poor one and has no business to have any."

"That is a hard way of looking at it, dear!"

"Not at all. Only a sensible way!"

"When does he reach England?"

"On the 13th, and intends coming here on the 15th."

"The night of the ball?"

"Yes. Would you rather he did not come here, Wat?" asked his aunt, throwing an anxious glance at him.

"Certainly not. Let him come by all means. Of course he looks upon Westcourt as his home."

"He won't be able to do that after next month."

"I suppose not."

"Louva would not like it."

"I don't think she would care a bawbee now."

"She might."

"Just possible, not probable. She has changed very much, has she not?"

"Wonderfully. She is not like the child of three years back."

"No, indeed. There is nothing left of the awkward, plain little girl who arrived here that cold March day."

"It is all thanks to your training and care."

"And her natural ability, Wat. There was good soil to work on, and I always thought she would grow up goodlooking."

"So did I. Eustace was of a different opinion."

"He will be greatly surprised!"

"He ought to be."

"He will hardly know her!"

"The eyes have not changed."

"No. But everything else has!"

"True, and improved!"

"There, she is coming up the drive," said Mrs. Wycherley, suddenly, "don't you think you had better go and meet her and tell her."

"Yes, I will!"

And catching up his hat with alacrity, the young man went out and joined Louva, and Mrs. Wycherley watched the two young people sauntering along with loving eyes.

A fortnight later, when Eustace Wycherley arrived at Westcourt, he found that there was to be a large ball there that evening, and the place in confusion.

It was eight when he arrived, and he only saw his mother and Wat. Louva was *non est*, and he did not trouble his head to ask after her, only ate some dinner in solitary state, and then went upstairs to dress.

Most of the guests had arrived when he went down, and dancing was going on with great vigour in the large drawing-room.

In the hall his mother was receiving late arrivals. On her right hand stood Wat, and on her left a tall and very beautiful young lady, in a long trailing gown of dead white silk that set off the creamy skin admirably, and threw up the dark auburn hair that was twisted in a coronal round the small head, and framed a face piquant, fascinating, attractive lighted by a pair of grey eyes that shone like stars.

For a moment he wondered who she was, and then told himself he was a fool not to have known Louva. And yet what a different Louva!

Three years of careful training, perfect dressing, and the natural transition from the awkward age of fifteen to the womanly one of nearly nineteen had done wonders.

The groundwork still remained, but all that was displeasing had disappeared.

Her skin was beautifully fair, her hair had darkened considerably, her figure had filled out, her wrists rounded, every movement, every gesture was full of a refined grace, and held a singular charm for the world-weary, hypercritical man.

He could not take his eyes off her fresh beautiful face, and watched her eagerly.

He saw she received no end of homage and adulation that she was more sought after and courted than any other woman in the room, and he burned with a strong desire to make her eyelids droop once more beneath his glance, her cheeks glow, her eyelids quiver.

His opportunity came at last towards the end of the evening.

Only the briefest greeting had been exchanged between them. She had been so surrounded and sought after.

Now, however, she stood alone by the window, gazing out at the landscape flooded with moonlight.

"Louva, will you come out for a turn on the terrace?" he asked, approaching her. "It will be cooler than in here."

"Yes. It will," she agreed, taking the arm he offered, and pacing beside him, her white dress falling in shimmering folds around her, the roses at her breast exhaling a faint, sweet perfume that intoxicated his senses with their heavy, subtle odour.

He looked at her, passionately longing in his eyes, and wished he could read some consciousness of those bygone days in her sweet face.

"Louva," he said, suddenly, pressing her hand to his side, "I wonder do you remember?"

"Remember what?" she asked, with perfect self-possession.

"The old happy days," he replied, with almost unconscious ardour in his tones.

"To what old happy days do you allude?"

"Those we spent together here. Do you ever give them a thought?"

"Sometimes. I have a good memory, Eustace."

"I am glad of it. I would not like you to forget them."

"Would you not?"

"No; though I was a fool in those days."

"Don't abuse yourself," she advised him, calmly. "You will always find plenty of enemies ready to do that."

"I was though."

"Why?"

"I didn't value your love as I should, Louva."

"Didn't you?"

"No; you did love me, did you not, childie?" he queried, very tenderly, trying to look into the starry eyes that were so persistently turned away.

"I don't know."

"Don't know?" he repeated in surprise, and with considerable chagrin, which he could not conceal.

"No. I have not analysed my feelings sufficiently to be able to decide certainly. But I am inclined to think that I, like you, was a fool then."

"Louva."

"Yes, a fool. Those were my salad days, you know. I was only a school girl, inexperienced, impressionable, and I believe any man with a good-looking face would have impressed me at that time as much as you did."

"Your words hurt me, Louva," he said, trying to speak plaintively.

"Do they?"

"Yes, I have hoped so much you would be glad to see me back again," which was an atrocious untruth, for he had never thought about it at all.

"I hardly see why I should be."

"Because of my love for you, childie."

"Your love! Did it ever exist for me, Eustace?" with a keen glance at him from the lovely eyes.

"It did, it does," he rejoined eagerly, clasping the hand that rested lightly on his arm. "I offer you the whole devotion of my heart, as deep, as firm a love as ever man offered woman. Oh, Louva, tell me you love me still, tell me you will be my wife?" he implored, passionately.

She released her hand from his clasp, and stood facing him, the moonbeams bathing her in their silvery radiance.

"No," she said in firm cold tones, "I cannot tell you that. I cannot throw away a reality for a shadow. I am going to marry a man who honestly and truly loves me, who has done so ever since he has known me, whom I respect and—"

"And do not love, Louva?"

"Whom I do love, even as he loves me. Who has been my friend, my stay, my support in every sorrow, to whom I would give the world did I possess it."

"Louva! You have forgotten me."

"You are right. 'One fire burns out another's burning!' A true and honourable love, has banished all memory of the false one. The mistake of my girlhood is rectified."

"And who is your affianced husband?" he asked in low, hoarse tones, while a wave of regret and remorse for his past folly swept over him.

"Your cousin Walter Wilson."

"He has won, I have lost. Well, I hope you'll be happy. He is a sterling fellow, and deserves his good fortune. Good-bye Louva, Heaven bless you," and he left her, and walked away into the shadows of the park, and Wat coming to look for her just then found her

alone, and drew her into his embrace, a willing prisoner, for she laid her head on his breast, and twining her white arms about his throat nestled close to him murmuring, "Walter, my dearest, you know I love you!"

"Yes dearest," he said softly, "I know it, I feel sure your heart is all mine."

"It is," she told him, with impassioned fervour. "It is yours now, and for ever until it ceases to beat."

"My darling."

And he drew her closer to him, and held her as though he never meant to let her go again.

[THE END.]

## GEORGE BLISSIT'S PERIL.

—10—

EVERYBODY in Highclere thought it perfectly natural that George Blissit, should marry pretty Jessie Amburst although George was only the telegraph operator at Highclere, and Jessie was the only child of Barton Amburst, who was chairman of the Highclere and Trumpington Railroad, and the richest man in all the country round.

But, then, if it had not been for the telegraph operator's presence of mind and bravery, the great man would have had no daughter to marry anybody.

It happened in this wise: There was a *fête* in the big grove about the Amburst mansion, and the *élite* of Highclere were there, paying homage to Jessie, in honour of whose seventeenth birthday the *fête* had been given.

She seemed to be most favourably impressed with Arthur Overton, a recent arrival in the neighbourhood.

He was swarthy and keen-eyed, and although he came from no one knew where, the fact that he had expensive apartments at the best hotel, and a snug amount at the Highclere Bank, was with most people recommendation enough, and he had no difficulty in entering the best circles of society.

From the first he had paid assiduous court to Jessie Amburst, and to-day he was her shadow.

The heiress seemed to like his homage, and when he proposed a row on the river she gladly consented.

Accordingly they embarked together in a little row-boat, but as it receded from the shore, Jessie's father called out to them from the bank an admonition to be careful as the current was strong.

The voyagers made the careful parent a laughing response, and Overton bent himself to the oars.

He had been planning all the afternoon how to get Jessie off by herself, for he had firmly resolved to bring matters to a crisis and ask her to be his wife.

He accordingly rowed straight to the middle of the stream, and then seizing her hand he declared his passion.

Now, although Jessie had always liked the handsome stranger's homage, she had never thought of him as a possible husband, and his vehemence frightened her.

"I—I—" she stammered, withdrawing her hand, and looking about her with frightened eyes.

As she looked about her a diversion presented itself.

heedless of their surroundings, they had allowed the boat to drift so that already it was in the swift current, rushing on towards a dangerous dam.

"See!" she cried, starting up. "We are nearing the dam! The oars, Mr. Overton!"

With a muttered curse at being balked, Overton glanced about him, recognized their danger, and hastily shipped the oars.

He bent to them with a will, and one of them snapped short off.

With a cry of dismay he dropped the other, and it, too, was caught in the current and swept away.



He could plainly hear the thunder of the falls, and every moment their danger increased. He had no idea of sacrificing his precious life even to save the girl to whom he had just declared his love.

He was a good swimmer, and throwing off his coat, he leaped into the river and struck out for the shore, which he reached in safety. Then hurrying to the hotel, he got together his baggage, settled up his account with the bank, and left Highclere forever.

Jessie finding herself deserted, set up a piteous wailing scream, and this cry of distress was heard by George Blisset, who was at work in the stuffy little telegraph office opposite the big dam.

He looked through the open window, saw Jessie's peril, rushed out, leaped into a little boat that he kept moored to the bank, and pulled towards her with all speed.

When he reached the drifting boat it was so close to the brink of the dam that he saw it would be utterly impossible to return to the shore.

Ahead of them was a large jutting out rock, which stood in the very centre of the dam, and overhung its edge.

"Courage, Miss Amhurst!" he cried, as he lifted the frightened girl into his own boat.

Then dropping one oar, and using the other as a rudder, he steered the boat towards the rock.

When the crash came, he seized Jessie in his arms, and leaped for the rock.

He landed upon it all right, but it was wet and slippery, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he could retain his hold upon it and keep her from being swept over the brink.

He shouted for help, and some railway hands at work near hurried to his assistance.

Under the direction of the foreman, a long, stout line was cast into the river, and when the end floated down to George, he fastened it about Jessie's waist, took several turns around the rock, and then signalled to the men on shore.

He had been growing weaker all the time, and now, as he finished the task that was to save Jessie, his fingers relaxed their hold upon the rock, and he was swept over the dam.

Jessie shrieked and fainted.

A boat, propelled by one of the men, was coming to her assistance along the rope, but she was lifted into the craft in an unconscious condition, and it was pulled slowly to the shore.

Several hours later, when she fully recovered consciousness, her first inquiry was for her brave rescuer.

"He had a most miraculous escape from death, dear," answered her father, who was sitting at the bedside. "It was one of the bravest acts I ever knew a man to do. He deliberately risked his life to save yours."

"And was he not drowned?" demanded Jessie, eagerly.

"No, thank Heaven!" was her father's hearty answer. "The water threw him into a deep pool at the foot of the dam, and managed to keep his head above water until assistance arrived. The doctor says he'll pull through all right, and he shall come up here to receive your thanks and mine, as soon as he is able."

Blisset was a good-looking, well-educated fellow, and his character was above reproach.

He fell in love with Jessie at once, and she with him, and when Mr. Amhurst saw how things were going, he rubbed his hands joyfully together.

"He's the only man I ever met that I thought good enough for her," he reflected. "He's poor, it's true, but he possesses something that gold can't buy; and, if he wants the girl he shall have her."

So Jessie and George were engaged, and life became one continued dream of happiness to them.

Jessie's father had stipulated that the marriage should not take place until she was nineteen years of age, but long before that time they quarrelled over a simple matter, and in the dispute that followed, Jessie made some spiteful reference to George's poverty, and asserted that he wanted her money and not her.

"Do you mean that?" he demanded, huskily.

"Yes. You're a fortune-hunter, and—and—I hate you!"

"That settles it," said George, in his quiet, determined way. "I bid you good-day and good-bye. I shall never trouble you again."

With these words he left her.

She would have called him back, but pride restrained her.

When he did not return she burst into an agony of tears.

She was sobbing bitterly when her father walked into the room. When she told him what had happened, he looked very grave.

"He must come back," sobbed Jessie, "for I love him. Oh, papa, bring him back!"

Thus appealed to, her father hurried off to the telegraph office. When he reached there, he found to his dismay that Blisset had resigned his position and left on the down train for London.

He telegraphed to intercept him, but somehow the message was not delivered, and George, with a bitter feeling of resentment in his heart against Jessie, reached London and at once started for Manitoba.

It was months before they heard of him, and then only indirectly. He had settled in a mining district, and was getting rich.

During this time Barton Amhurst had met with terrible reverses, and he found himself, in his old age, reduced almost to penury.

It was then that Jessie showed her true nobility of character. She and her father left Highclere and settled in the country town of Gatesford.

In the happy days when she and George were lovers he had taught her telegraphy, and she took advantage of this knowledge now as a means of livelihood.

A rival railway company had opened a grand hotel in the town with telegraphic communication on the premises, and upon application to the local manager she was given the position of day operator.

She never ceased to think of George, and to regret the hasty words of anger that had driven him from her. One day when she had been in Gatesford about a year she heard a familiar voice, and looking up she saw George Blisset just entering the office.

He was bronzed and bearded and handsomer than ever. He was accompanied by a man of about his own age whom he called Jim, and it was in addressing the latter that Jessie had heard his voice.

The bookkeeper recognized Jim and called him by name.

"Aren't you Jim Gray, who used to be the telegraph operator over at the station?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Jim, "and this is my partner, George Blisset. He was at Highclere Junction. We've been to America, made our pile, and now we've come home to enjoy it. See this bag?" and he held aloft a leather satchel. "Well, that holds our fortune."

At this boast the clerk opened his eyes, Jim chuckled, and he and George went their way to their rooms.

Neither of them particularly noticed the pale-faced telegraph girl.

And neither of them noticed at all the dark-faced, evil-eyed man lounging near the desk, who drank in Jim Gray's boastful words with greedy ears.

When the partners left the office, he slunk away.

Presently Jim returned, and asking for pen and paper, went into the reading-room to write a letter.

Suddenly the electric bell, in the indicator behind the book-keeper's desk rang sharply.

He glanced up at the number, called "Forward!" and was about to order the servant who responded to go to Number 56, and see what was wanted, when an exclamation of astonishment escaped him, and he said, instead,—

"What's the matter with that fellow? Guess he don't know what an electric bell's for."

For the bell was ringing out peal after peal in quick succession.

"Oh, heavens!"

It was this cry, falling from the lips of Jessie Amhurst, who rushed from her little compartment with terror depicted in every feature, that further heightened the book-keeper's bewilderment.

For a full minute Jessie stood staring at the indicator, with her head thrown forward, and then rushing into the reading-room, she seized Jim Gray by the arm.

"Quick!" she cried. "Your partner, Mr. Blisset, is in danger. Three robbers are in his room, about to murder him! He wants you to—"

But before she could finish, Jim Gray leaped to his feet, and without any inquiries as to the why and wherefore, ran from the room.

George Blisset was in deadly peril. While his partner was absent, he had got out his shaving materials and prepared to take off his shaggy beard.

He was busily engaged at this task, when the door opened.

He thought it was Jim, and rinsing the lather from his eyes, he turned, only to find a man holding a revolver in his face, another locking the door, and a third searching the room for the bagful of money which Jim had thrown under the bed.

"Back up against that wall!" commanded the man with the revolver, whose face looked strangely familiar to George, and with the muzzle of the weapon staring him in the face he obeyed.

"Put your hands behind you!" was the next command; and Blisset did as he was ordered.

"Keep him there till I find the stuff," said the man who was searching the room, "and then we'll slit his throat and slope."

At the same instant George Blisset's fingers touched behind him, in the wainscot of the wall, a little projection, which he recognised as the call-button that connected by wire with the electric bell of the indicator in the book-keeper's office.

Instinctively he remembered his old-time telegraphic skill. He pressed the button the same as if it were a telegraph key, rapidly spelling out by dots and dashes the words which caused the bell in the office to ring out this message:

"Jim—Three robbers have door locked to get our dust and murder me. Get a step-ladder to the window. Be quick and careful."

During the time required to spell out word by word this message, he prayed mentally that his partner might be about the office to interpret it.

He had sent the message, and begun to repeat it, almost in despair of success, when, bang! bang! two shots were fired through the window, and as the man who had not been hit turned quickly, George sprang upon him and bore him to the floor.

They were struggling there for the mastery when the door was forced open, and Jim Gray bounded into the room.

There was plenty of help, and two of the robbers were soon secured. The other one, who had covered Blisset with his revolver, lay on the floor, with the blood trickling from a serious wound in the back of his head.

The ex-telegraph operator, after a searching look at the fellow's face, recognised him as Jessie Amhurst's cowardly companion that day in the boat—Arthur Overton.

It was when George spoke of this to his partner that the latter remembered the girl

who had given the alarm, and he hurried downstairs to thank her.

Blisset followed him, and the old lovers came face to face.

"Jessie!"

"George!"

And they were clasped in each other's arms, forgiven and forgiving.

Between the sobs of joy that she could not repress as her old lover strained her to him, Jessie explained how she had managed to save both his life and his fortune.

"It was a blessed thing that you taught me telegraphy, George," she said. "It has enabled me to make a living since papa lost his money, and if I hadn't known how to read by sound, the message that you sent to your partner on the electric ball wire would not have been understood, and those robbers would have robbed and killed you."

## FACETIÆ.

**PLEASANT FOR HIS READERS**—We are married. Good-bye to mother-in-law jokes.

A TAILOR being asked if the close of the year made him sad, said yes, until the clothes of the year are paid for.

A PARIS paper devotes a corner to "first-class deaths." Will there be any first-class resurrections, we wonder.

PRIVATE receptions are not always appropriate, but they are *en règle* for the man who comes home tipsy at one o'clock A.M.

NORAH: "An' haw your mistress good taste?" BRIDGET: "Good taste, is it? Faith, her dresses look better on me than do me own."

"Yes," said Mrs. Porcine, "I am mighty afraid of ghosts, but then I keep them away from me by wearing an omelet round my neck."

SAD-FACED TRAMP: "Madam, I am a homeless man." PATIENT housewife: "Well, if you are home less than my husband is, I pity your poor wife."

SANDY accepted the gude wife's invitation with the reservation, "If I am spared." "Weel, weel," said the lady, "if ye're dead, I'll not expect ye."

Gor too fly. Post: "I have a little flight of fancy here—" "It's mighty lucky you brought your wings with you. Stabbe, will you open the window?"

AN unlucky recommendation. COHEN: "I tell you, my friend, those clothings vill wear like iron!" UPON DOWNES: "I believe you; they look a little rusty already."

"Is it possible, Bridget, that you are looking through my trunks?" "Yis, mum," said Bridget, calmly; "and didn't I catch you looking through mine the other day?"

"My dearest Ida, how is it that you, the liveliest girl in our set, are going to marry and settle down?" "Nothing is simpler, my dear. The summer bonnets for matrons are so becoming!"

OMAHA MOTHER: "Why, Bobby, how you have grown since you were home last." SON (a messenger boy): "Yes, it's been a long time. I've delivered three letters since I've been away."

NAGLEY: "You wanted to get married bad enough, Lord knows, when I took you. You'd a married a fool." MRS. NAGLEY (meekly): "Well, don't twit me with what I have done. We all make mistakes."

THEY were getting a kindergarten lesson. The teacher took them as very simple subjects. She touched a table. "What is this?" "Wood." "What is this?" she asked as she touched the fender. "Iron." "What is this?" and she took up an acid bottle. "Glass." "What is this?" and she touched her watchchain. "Brass," said one small boy, and she changed the subject.

JOHNNY DUMPSY (with inflated paper bag): "S'h-h! See me, bu' at this bag by grandma's ear." Grandma (after the explosion, placidly laying her knitting in her lap and looking towards the door): "Comelin'."

HONEY bees drove a Florida grocer out of store, in their eagerness to absorb his sugar. But in about ten minutes they became so weighted with sand that they fell to the floor and the grocer swept them out.

PHYSICIAN: "You see your son is feverish, madam. Notice the coating on his tongue." MRS. ANXIOUS: "I don't see any coating on his tongue; but I see an ulcer in his throat, and his pants are dreadful short."

JUSTICE: "You say you did not know that you were violating the law. Ah! but my dear sir, ignorance of the law is no excuse to any man." PRISONER: "That's kind o' rough on both of us, ain't it, judge?" CRIER: "Order in the court."

POLICE JUDGE: "State how the trouble originated." ACCUSED: "We was holdin' a debatin' society, and I said I had the floor and he called me a liar." JUDGE: "What followed?" ACCUSED: "From that time until we were arrested we both had the floor."

MOTHER (gazing at her daughter's dressing cushion): "Why, where did you get so many gentlemen's scarf pins?" DAUGHTER: "I don't know myself. I find one in my hair almost every night after Gus calls, and to save me I can't imagine how they get there."

"WHAT are you crying for?" said a friend to a young wife, who stood weeping disconsolately. "Because," said she, "my husband left me this morning without kissing me!"

"MY," added Mr. Jacobs, "there are plenty of women in America who would cry if you did kiss 'em!"

MRS. DE SUFFRAGE (finishing her lecture): "And now, ladies, all who would go to the polls it allowed to vote stand up. That's glorious! Every one up. Will that lady in the front row nearest my desk please tell us why she would be so willing to go to the polls?" LADY: "To see what the other lady voters had on."

ON the Brighton Esplanade: "Well, old fellow, I hear that you are going to be married. Let me congratulate you; but if I'm right about the lady, I fancy you'll have your pinions clipped." "Pinions! Don't mention the word, I ain't fellow always pinioned when he's exsented?"

YOUNG LADY (crossly, at the head of the parade): "Mary, Mary! Why ever don't you answer the bell? It's Harold—I mean Mr. Harold Smith—at the door." "It isn't Mr. Harold, Miss, it's Mr. Jones." "Stop a minute, then, Mary, I must change the photographs in the drawing-room."

"DID I ever say all that?" he asked, despondently, as she replaced the phonograph on the corner of the mantel-piece. "You did." "And you can grind it out of that machine whenever you choose?" "Certainly." "And your father is a lawyer?" "Yes." "Mabel, when can I place the ring on your finger and call you my wife?"

JULIA (with a dreamy look in her eyes): "Can you guess of what I am thinking, George?" GEORGE (taking her hand tenderly): "No, dearest Julia, but I hope it is of me." "Well, partly; but I was thinking of the cozy little room we will fix up for mother after we return from our wedding trip." (George didn't look so pleased.)

AFTER the feed of yesterday. Clerk (sitting up in bed, holding his head): "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! When I was a little hazy yesterday I asked the chief to let me marry his daughter, and now I don't know whether he gave me his consent or notice to leave." PRINCIPAL (vainly trying to eat at the breakfast table and holding his aching brow, talking to his wife): "We were pretty gay yesterday, and the clerk asked me for Ida. Now, by heaven! I don't know whether I promised him her hand or not!"

"MOLLIE, I wish you would be a better little girl," said a fond father to his little daughter. "You have no idea how sorry I am that mamma has to scold you always." "Don't worry about it, papa," was the reply of the little angel. "I am not one of these sensitive children. Half the time I don't hear what she says."

MISS LIGHTED: "I was much admired at the wedding reception last night. I noticed one gentleman who never took his eyes off me the whole evening." MISS SHARPE: "Did the gentleman have a black moustache waxed on the ends?" "Yes; do you know him?" "I know of him. He is a detective. He was there to watch the presents."

ANGEL CHILD, to distant relative, who is dining with the family: "I got somethin' for Uncle Josiah. Here it is." Distant Relative: "My good little man, why do you suppose I want that box of blacking?" ANGEL CHILD: "Mother knows." MOTHER: "No, I don't, my dear." ANGEL CHILD: "Well, didn't you say Uncle Josiah hadn't any polish?"

A TIMELY caution. Husband: "Don't worry, my dear, if I get home a trifle late occasionally, now that I've joined the Athletic Club, I need to be a great athlete when I was a boy, you know, and it seems like renewing my youth to go through with the old exercises again." WIFE: "No, John, I won't, but when you get home at 2 A.M., as you did this morning, please don't renew your youth by standing on your head in the front porch, nor climbing through the transom, because it's apt to excite remark, you know—that's all, dear."

MRS. BRANLESS: "Ah, me dear Mrs. Montanarich, allow me to thank you for the very kind invitation that brought me hither to-night. It was so very kind of you to remember me, thanks, thanks." MRS. MONTANARICH: "Ha, Mr. Branless, don't mention it, and excuse me for sending the invite around so late, but, at the last minute, one of the other gents I'd asked sent word he couldn't come, and, true, we was in a nice pickle with the table all set, and dinner ordered for sixteen, and nobody to take Miss Skinner out. It's awful lucky I thought of you, I think. Now come and be introduced to Miss Skinner."

THE American Indians are certainly not lacking in sharpness, as the following story shows. An Indian boy asked the meaning of the word "miss." "To miss," the teacher told him, "is the same as to fall. You shoot at a bird, or at a mark, and do not hit it. You go to a tailor's for a coat, and your coat fits badly; it is a misfit. You hope to enter the middle class next year, but you cannot pass the examination, and so you miss the promotion." His face wore a puzzled look, and he shook his head; his difficulty was not removed. "Then," said the teacher, "there is another meaning of 'miss.' We call a married woman 'Madam,' but an unmarried woman 'Miss.' The boy's face brightened; he smiled and nodded. "Ah, I see!" said he, "she has missed her man."

THE good old minister of Blairmally is no stickler for etiquette, and likes his visits to the members of his flock to be as informal and homely as possible; but he has a great regard for truth, and is invariably down on those whom he detects in any deviation therefrom. Recently calling unexpectedly on a widow who lives in a cottage on the outskirts of the village, he surprised her in the midst of washing a lot of clothes. She hurriedly hid behind a clothes horse, and told her little boy to say that she was out. The visitor knocked at the door. "Well, Jamie," he said, "and where's your mother?" "My mother's no in; she's down the street on a message," replied the lad, with promptness. "Indeed," replied the minister, with a glance at the bottom of the screen. "Well, tell her I called; and say that the next time, she goes down to the village she might take her feet with her."



## SOCIETY.

At a recent New York wedding the bride carried a jewelled prayer-book, the gift of the groom's mother, which cost £1,000.

HARDLY any petticoats are worn this year, which fact is a presage, in itself, of very tightly fitting skirts to come upon us in the near future.

The fashion of straw hats for lady riders is on the increase, and as soon as our eyes have become used to them we shall doubtless consider them much prettier, as well as more comfortable, than the once orthodox chimney-pot.

The Queen is so tired of sitting for portraits, that she has refused to have her picture painted for the Victoria Art Gallery at Melbourne, but she is willing to allow a replica of her Jubilee portrait by Angell to be made for the Colony which bears her name.

A CURIOUS fan is exhibited in New York. After a close inspection one would think that the sticks are fringed with the most filmy and costly lace. But what appears to be lace is human hair. It is split and woven so finely that it nods and waves before the breath like swan's down.

A VENETIAN glass manufacturer is said to be making and selling bonnets by the thousand. The glass cloth of which they are made has the same shimmer and brilliancy of colour as silk, and is impervious to water.

THE heart of Nae-el-Din has been completely subjugated by the loveliness and amiability of the Princess of Wales, whom he calls a "Pearl of the Universe," and he takes the deepest interest in everything concerning the happy unrestrained home life of the Royal mother and her daughters, a kind of existence that is to him a sort of celestial enigma.

RIBBONS, lace, silken omissions, velvet carpets, muslin curtains, ran riot as ornaments for the houses of pet dogs at the recent show, while a few owners afforded their pets looking-glasses in which to admire their deformities. One good lady had actually lined her idol's house with mirrors, painted with water-lilies and reeds. A Blenheim spaniel of rare and peculiar ugliness was apparently so precious that it had to be enclosed in a glass case, and only needed a hand-organ underneath it to make it complete.

LARON watch chains are things of the past, and only attach themselves to elderly uninteresting persons who have done with passing fashions of this world and just wear out what they possess in stock. Nobody wants yard-long chains, for the watch pocket is worn high on the corse, and the watch merely requires a few inches of safeguard.

INCREDIBLE as it may seem, it is a fact that the little boy who has commanded so much notice during the Shah's present visit to us, and who is only ten years old, has absolute authority over and the responsible custody of the enormously valuable jewels which the Shah takes with him on his travels. Little Aziz-uz-Sultan is really a "man in authority," seen through the wrong end of an opera-glass, and has secretaries and other officials at his disposal, and no single jewel can be delivered without his written order. Astonishing as this may appear, it is the simple truth.

THE Jubilee fête of the Royal Botanic Society was celebrated recently, a "floral parade and feast of roses," which was participated in by a brilliant and numerous company. The Prince and Princess of Wales and their daughters, besides other members of the Royal Family and the Earl of Eife were present.

LORD FINE has purchased Sir Arthur Fairbairn's house, 15, Portman Square, and will take up his residence there in lieu of his mansion in Cavendish Square.

## STATISTICS.

DURING June, 11,491 tons of fish were delivered at Billingsgate—8,595 tons by land, and 2,896 by water.

RUSSIA, whose death-rate is the highest in Europe, has among its teeming populations only 15,414 regular physicians, and but one surgeon to 100,000 inhabitants.

THE United States is still the chief silver-yielding country in the world. The output of silver last year was 45,783,682 oz. The output of gold was much less—1,604,927 oz.

IN 1816 it took just one bushel of corn to buy one pound of nails; now one bushel of corn will buy ten pounds of nails. Then it required 64 bushels of barley to buy one yard of broadcloth; now the same amount of barley will pay for 20 yards of broadcloth. It then required the price of one bushel of wheat to pay for one yard of calico; now one bushel of wheat will buy 20 yards of calico.

## GEMS.

A LIVE, generally of a grave hue, may be said to be embroidered with occasional sports and fantasies.

WE often excuse our own want of philanthropy by giving the name of fanaticism to the more ardent zeal of others.

THE real use of all knowledge is this, that we should dedicate the reason given to us by God to the use and advantage of man.

DISCONTENT is a self-caged bird that delights in gnawing away at his perch till it breaks, for he can then find one more discomfort to complain of.

CULTIVATE the mercy that sees in others only their good points—the truth that clings to things as they are, not as they are represented by others.

WHAT maintains one vice would bring up two children. You may think that a little tea or a little punch now and then, diet a little more costly, clothes perhaps a little finer and a little entertainment now and then, can be no matter; but remember many a little makes a meikle; and further, beware of little expenses; a small leak will sink a great ship.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

A LONDON medical man says: Be careful in your dealings with horseradish. It irritates the stomach far more than spice, and an overdose will bring on an unpleasant sensation for days.

RASPBERRY VINEGAR.—Have as many red raspberries as you wish; cover with vinegar, and stand for twenty-four hours. Then put all in a jellypan, scald (that is, bring it almost to the boil), then strain it. To each breakfast cup of juice put half a pound of sugar; boil twenty minutes, and when cool bottle for use. It will keep for years. One spoonful in a glass of water is delightful for a sick person.

A GOOD SALAD (FRENCH).—Pick the lettuce to pieces, wash each leaf carefully, and dry them well in a napkin. Break the leaves into suitable pieces, and put them all into a salad bowl, that has been rubbed with a shalot. Then pour on to the salad one tablespoonful of vinegar and three tablespoonfuls of oil. Season with pepper and salt; sprinkle over it some finely chopped chervil and tarragon, and mix it all up well; cut up some hard-boiled egg in slices and lay them on the top. It is most important that the salad should be well dried, and it should never be touched with a knife.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE eleventh commandment, according to General Tecumseh Sherman, is to mind your own business.

IT is said that rattlesnakes know how to choose a healthful home. Where they make their home, there is no malaria, the air is dry, and the water is pure.

"To feel a little drowsy," is the term applied to his condition by the man who sleeps seven stations past the place where he wants to get off. If he doesn't wake till some time next day, he admits that he is "sleepy."

THERE is an ancient story of the proprietor of a curiosity shop who exhibited the sword of Baalam. Upon being told that Baalam did not possess a sword, but wished for one, he retorted that the sword in question was the identical one for which Baalam wished.

EVERY nation has its peculiar customs. When, for instance, in Germany, a person sneezes, everybody in the immediate vicinity of the sneezer says solemnly the German equivalent for "Your very good health." The custom is said to have originated during one of the plagues which swept Europe in the Middle Ages. When a person afflicted with the dread disease sneezed, it was regarded as an unfailing sign that the crisis of the disease was passed, and the patient recovering.

BOOKS published in the time of Cromwell bore some curious titles: "Eggs of Charity, layed by the chickens of the Covenant, and boiled with the water of Divine Love. Take ye and eat." "High heeled shoes for Dwarfs in Holiness." "The Gun of Penitence." "The Spiritual Mustard Pot to make the Soul Sneeze with Devotion." "Tobacco battered, and the Pipes shattered about their Ears that idly idolize so loathsome a Vanity, by a Volley of Holy Shot, thundered from Mount Helicon;" a poem against the use of tobacco, by Joshua Sylvester.

FROM where do all the flies come? The question is often asked, and seldom receives as satisfactory an answer as has been given by a contemporary: The common fly lays more than one hundred eggs, and the time from egg-laying to maturity is only about two weeks. Most of us have studied geometrical progression. Here we see it illustrated: Suppose one fly commences "to multiply and replenish the earth" about June 1. June 15, if all lived, would give one hundred and fifty. Suppose seventy-five of these are females, July 1 would give us, supposing no cruel war or other untoward circumstances to interfere, 11,250 flies. Suppose 5,625 of these are females, we might have July 15, 843,750 flies. For fear of bad dreams, I will not calculate what might be by September 15.

HEN Majesty the Queen of Madagascar has lately taken her yearly bath, and the act was surrounded with due pomp and ceremony. The official report states:—"A solemn procession filed through, bearing the water for the bath, materials for the fire to heat it, made directly under the bath-tub itself, the towels, soap, perfume, and various toilet appointments. As soon as the water was sufficiently heated the fire was put out, prayers were said, and a hymn sung imploring that the Queen suffer no harm from her daring act; and then, as she disappeared behind the curtain, a salvo of artillery was fired and the drums beat to announce to the excited multitudes outside that the important part of the ceremony was taking place. At the end of a brief fifteen minutes the Queen reappeared, somewhat paler in hue, but gorgeously arrayed, and wearing all the crown jewels. In her hand she carried an ox-horn, tipped and bound with silver, full of water taken from the bath just previous to her entrance to it. Bearing this, and accompanied by the Prime Minister, she marched to the palace portal, where she dipped a branch into the water, and sprinkled the spectators as they passed along.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**TOPSY.**—Certainly not.

**TILLY.**—The gentleman buys the ring.

**SIR GEORGE.**—There is no license required.

**H. S.**—You can get the song at any musicsellers.

**TURTLE DOVE.**—Your letter is quite incomprehensible.

**BARBARA.**—The 15th of August, 1889, was on Thursday.

**ROLLING STONE.**—We have heard of the poem, but do not know where it is to be found.

**N. A.**—We are sorry, but we cannot give business names and addresses in this column.

**ONLY A GIRL.**—Lemon juice will often remove freckles. It is the most harmless remedy known.

**LADY MACBETH.**—The lady has rather a stern look, but it is coupled with much intelligence.

**LADY JANE.**—Flowers are worn more than feathers this year; still the latter are by no means unfashionable.

**GEORGE S.**—We never attempt to give medical advice; you should consult a doctor. 2. The 17th of May, 1872, was on Friday.

**ONE IN DOUBT.**—You know the gentleman, we do not. If you are at all doubtful of him, get your friends to ask what his intentions are.

**GRISBIDA.**—Girls should never under any circumstances attempt to use arsenic as a cosmetic; the practice is a very dangerous one.

**AGNES.**—General exercise in the open air, and especially long walks, will prove of service to you. We know of no other suggestion of practical value to make.

**SANDY.**—Nineteen is rather young to engage yourself to a lady; you would be wiser to wait a few years till your position in life is assured and you can offer her a home.

**CHERRY BLOSSOM.**—Nothing will remove freckles and sunburn from some skins but time. Try what glycerine and eau de cologne in equal quantities will do for yours.

**T. T.**—The process described is applied to zinc before it is painted to clean its surface and make the paint hold on to it. We should have thought that this was sufficiently obvious.

**CHICK.**—The custom of throwing rice is borrowed from the East; it is by no means a pleasant habit, and some serious accidents have happened from it. Old shoes are said to be lucky.

**ONE ANXIOUS TO KNOW.**—You had better try and come to some arrangement with your brother; if your mother left no will, he is undoubtedly the heir-at-law and can claim her property.

**J. C.**—Steamships of the class of the *Etruria* burn, if necessary to keep up their speed, about three hundred tons of coal in twenty-four hours, and their officers and crew number about two hundred.

**SHUB** requests us to tell him where "that contrivance" for straightening noses can be obtained. Is it called a mechanical appliance? We cannot give addresses. Yes, it is a mechanical appliance.

**PERPLEXED.**—Let him have a trial voyage and see what he thinks of it. Be sure that he will grumble at his fate whether he goes to sea or not, and indulge his present inclination lest he should play truant.

**HOT WATER.**—You have given the pronunciation of the word "Glasgow" in your letter as nearly as it can be written; it is almost impossible to produce it in print; it is one of those words that must be heard to be understood.

**DORA.**—For acne, it is recommended to sponge the parts affected with a strong solution of powdered borax and water. If of long standing, or of an obstinate character, consult a physician who is skilled in skin diseases.

**INTERESTED.**—The choice of names rests with the writers, consequently we cannot oblige you. Perhaps the young man can write an interesting story. Ask him, and, if so, he may in that way indulge his fancy to the top of his bent.

**UNEDUCATED POLLY.**—If you are, as you say, entirely self-taught, you have done very well; you may improve yourself a great deal by practice. Take time over your writing and do not hurry it; form every letter carefully and you will soon write a very good hand.

**HAMILTON HARRIS.**—"When Greeks joined Greeks, then was the 'tug of war,'" is a line out of the play of "Alexander the Great," by Nathaniel Lee. We are glad to know that you find so much pleasure in our little paper. We do our best to find something for all our friends.

**VICKY.**—Take the advice of some old man—the one you would appoint for a guardian—and he will tell you what to do. The only way to obtain a position as book-keeper or copyist is to apply for it when you hear there is a vacancy in an office. Your writing says you are a refined, lady-like girl.

**DOT.**—Do not squeeze or manipulate the persistent pimple on your nose, or it may turn to a cancer. Touch it with carbolic vaseline, and also with cream and sulphur. Take no stimulants, and drink the water of sulphur springs, bottled, if you cannot have access to it fresh from the springs.

**MOTHER.**—Unless you can pay a heavy premium you cannot place your lad in any chemical factory. If he is really crazy on the subject, let him try the retail business. He has passed his preliminary examination, and he may in time attain to the dignity of one hundred and fifty pounds a year.

**CAREFUL MOTHER.**—It is generally considered injurious for little children to sleep with old people. Put your little one in another room, if possible, and she will most likely soon recover her good looks and her brightness. If the grandmother is delicate there is all the more danger in the child sleeping with her.

**S. S. S.**—Your melancholia is caused, without doubt, by the fact that you have nothing to do with your idle moments. Take up some fad, and enter into it with your whole heart and soul, then you will not have time for "crying spells." There is no cure for melancholia but hard work. Try it and see if it will not cure you.

**ELITE.**—1. The meeting of the eyebrows is said to indicate a strong but rather cruel and vindictive nature. 2. Bumps behind the ears mean combativeness—a defiant and masterful character. 3. The skin can be dyed harmlessly with a strong, boiled solution of log-wood or of walnut bark, "set" with a lump of copperas.

**W. J. H.**—There are so many ways of tying sashes worn with the Eastern dresses of all sorts that we cannot tell you. With some dresses it is merely tied over ones and allowed to hang loose at the side; in Japan the sashes worn by the ladies are tied in a huge bow at the back, so large that it looks almost like a pillow.

**SOPHIA.**—1. To keep dandruff away, wash the head frequently in water that contains a few drops of ammonia. 2. Some vocalists take the white of a raw egg before singing, others think lemon juice is preferable for clearing the voice. 3. To keep the blood from running down in the hands, put them above your head and shake them gently for about fifteen minutes.

## KITTY LEE.

Perhaps there is some sweeter face,  
Than hers, though how I cannot see;  
Others a loftier lineage trace,  
And boast, perhaps, of their degree.

She has not wealth, and knows not pride,  
But has a nature glad and free;  
That fortune some things has denied  
Spells not the heart of Kitty Lee.

To minister to human need,  
Do good by stealth, care not for fame,  
Is her desire—and this, indeed,  
Has wrought a halo round her name.

A soft, deep radiance lights her eyes,  
Which thrills me by its rapturous spell;  
Her quiet life I highly prize,  
And one event is left to tell.

I took her hand, the other day,  
And though my words were faint and few,  
She spoke in her familiar way,  
Till all I thought at once she knew.

So now is banished every fear;  
I am as happy as can be;  
Since on the morning of the year  
I won the heart of Kitty Lee!

J. B.

**ELLEN D.**—To remove grease from cashmere, lay the goods on a piece of soft brown paper and iron it on the wrong side. Or if it is a delicate colour, rub French chalk on it and lay it in the sun, or get a bottle of benzine and cleanse it. Various stains and discolorations removed from soft materials by an application of turpentine.

**IGNORANCE.**—The breviary is so called because it is an abridgment of the books used in the services of the Roman Catholic Church. It contains the seven canonical hours according to the saying of David, "Seven times a day do I praise Thee." The breviary came into use among the ecclesiastical orders about 1080; and was reformed by the Councils of Trent and Cologne, and by Pius V., Urban VIII., and other popes. The quality of type in which the breviary was first printed gave the name to the printing type called breviary.

**DASUE.**—1. Neither hot nor very cold water should be used on the skin. Tepid, blood-warm water is best, though cool water is nice and stimulating in the morning. 2. Superfluous hair can be removed temporarily by the pitch-plaster or common court-plaster, then the after application of lime will kill the roots. 3. Grass eyes can be cured by an operation that is not very painful. It is a delicate operation, however, and you should go to a good oculist. 4. Dandruff can be prevented by rubbing the scalp with a mixture of weak tincture of cantharides, rum, and a little quinine.

**LOVING IDA.**—A girl of fourteen may readily fancy that she can love, particularly if she be of a romantic turn of mind, but few young ladies of that age are qualified to comprehend what the tender passion is as pictured by poets and novelists. Juliet is represented to love Romeo at the age our correspondent makes inquiry about; but such heroines are not often seen off the stage. If the real object of your query is to ascertain if a girl of fourteen in this quarter of the globe is old enough to marry, the answer is no. It were better for her to be at school, storing her mind with the knowledge necessary to fit her properly for the matrimonial state.

**ANXIOUS INQUIRER.**—There is no absolute rule in the matter. A widow or widower is free to marry as soon as he or she pleases. It is not considered decorous to be in too great a hurry; but circumstances may, and doubtless do, arise in many cases to make it expedient to do so. The case you speak of as "horrid" may be one of this sort.

**NO SENSE.**—Your trouble, of imagining everything you say sounds silly, is a very common one, and it is sincerely wished it were possible to give you the required recipe for common sense, so it might be passed around. Unfortunately, that recipe is not doled out to the common herd. Your writing says you are refined, frank, and pleasant.

**B. T. H.**—The following is given as a way of removing grease from books: Warm the part soiled—this can be done with a flat iron—and then put a piece of blotting-paper on each side of the leaf, and press it against it with a warm iron. Take fresh blotting-paper as often as the grease shows itself on it, and by this means you will extract most of the stain.

**CONTROVERSY.**—Dryden wrote in the "Flower and the Leaf":

Nine worthies were they called of different rites—  
Three Jews, three Pagans, and three Christian knights.  
These "worthies" were Josiah, David, and Judas  
Maccabaeus; Hector, Alexander, and Julius Caesar;  
Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Bouillon.

**TRUTH.**—No one has any right to interfere with an adult person's religious belief. It would be well, however, to consider the wishes of one's parents or husband as to the particular church to join, for it really makes little difference which one of the Christian churches you become a member of. They have all pretty much the same ground work, and the minor distinctions do not matter.

**B. B.**—1. No, it should not be considered a cause of offence to decline in a courteous way, with thanks and regrets, to be your friend's "best man" at his wedding. 2. Any simple piece of silver or pretty or useful article is suitable for a wedding gift. A small bronze or marble statuette, a pair of vases, a handsomely bound book, a morocco writing-case, or a picture in a pretty frame.

**LURELINE.**—It is not a disgrace for a girl of fifteen to go on the stage to make her living, but it is a dangerous and difficult thing to do. The temptations and trials of stage life are very numerous, and we would not advise any young girls to risk them. We do not know of a dramatic group that requires an actress. The best way to get on would be to go to a theatrical agency and put your name on the books as an applicant for engagement.

**LADY A.**—1. Your writing is too profuse of flourishes, particularly in the capital letters, to make it acceptable for book-keeping. Correct this fault and it will pass muster very well. 2. If your lips are naturally thick it will be difficult to correct the defect. We have seen a handbag worn at night over the lips, and frequent compression from the fingers resorted to during the day. Avoid biting your lips or sucking them in, as this enlarges them.

**SUNFLOWER.**—Do not give way to discontented thoughts about being "fit for something better"; doubtless you are in your right place in the world at present, and when a chance comes of anything better, depend upon it you will be able to avail yourself of it. Girls now-a-days are too apt to look down upon domestic service as beneath them. A servant who does her duty thoroughly and contentedly is as worthy of respect and honour as the proudest lady in the land.

**M. B.**—A woman's hair may grow to the length of six feet. Mme. Hese, of Paris, refused 5,000 francs for her "cranial covering," which was about that measurement. Four hundred hairs of average thickness would cover an inch of space. The blonde belle has about 140,000 filaments to comb and brush, while the red-headed beauty has to be satisfied with 88,000; the brown-haired damsel may have 109,000; the black-haired but 102,000. Few ladies consider that they carry some forty or fifty miles of hair on their heads; the fair-haired may even have to dress seventy miles of threads of gold every morning. A German experimentalist has proven that a single hair will suspend four ounces without breaking, stretching under the process and contracting again. But the hair thus heavily weighted must be dark brown, for blonde hair breaks down under two and a-half ounces. No wonder, then, that "beauty can draw love by a single hair."

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